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History in the Service and Disservice of Life

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Introduction

The young Nietzsche described the philosopher as a physician of culture, and his own thought can be understood both as a diagnosis of the crisis or sickness of his time, the nineteenth century, and the quest for a cure. In his first published book, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), Nietzsche placed his hopes for the rejuvenation of Germany—and ultimately the world—in the music of Richard Wagner. He sustained that enthusiasm through one of the "unmodern observations" or "thoughts out of season," but thereafter disillusion ensued: he repudiated Wagner and abandoned the possibility of a German cultural revival. With this he entered into the second period of his development, a stage characterized by disenchantment and a leaning toward Western positivism. The typical book of this period, *Human, All-Too-Human* (1878), reflected his new mood in its title, the dedication to Voltaire, and its aphoristic style. Nietzsche articulated his final position in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883–85) and the books that follow it.

Nietzsche's thought, however, manifests a fundamental unity, or at least continuity, even as it progresses. For example, in *Twilight of the Idols* (1889), the last book he was able to see through to completion, he affirms *The Birth of Tragedy* as his first revaluation of all values. So he also never repudiated, but rather deepened, the view of his age as sick and in critical condition, a view he had expressed from the outset; and the problems he raised during the first stage of his development are problems with which he never ceased to wrestle. For this reason the reader in search of illuminating access to Nietzsche's thought will find *History in the Service and Disservice of Life* as instructive as it is exhilarating and eloquent.

Most readers, to be sure, turn to Nietzsche not primarily to gain access to his thought, but to clarify their own thinking; and they seek instruction not about the crisis of Nietzsche's time, but about their own. In this respect, too, the study of Nietzsche as reflections on the perils and promises of history recommends itself. The problems Nietzsche confronted in the nineteenth century remains those of the twentieth century. Indeed, the passage of time has almost conferred on Nietzsche the status of prophet, so keen were his perceptions of the present and the future. Thoughtful men may reject the cures he recommended, but we ignore his diagnosis at our peril.

In his Foreword to *History in the Service and Disservice of Life,* Nietzsche presents himself as a critic of and against his age, who seeks changes for the benefit of a future age. He also takes pride in identifying himself as "the nursling of past ages, above all of the Greek

past." He thus appears to criticize modernity from the perspective of antiquity, to assess and judge the present by standards he had discovered in classical philosophy.

To an appreciable degree that appearance is deceptive. The Greek past that Nietzsche admires is for the most part the Greece that precedes the classical "golden age" of Greek philosophy. He takes his bearings not by an antiquity which Winckelmann could describe as characterized by "noble simplicity and serene grandeur," but by a past whose presiding genius is Dionysus and whose doom was announced by the advent of Socratic rationalism. The tone of the present essay is clearly more moderate and less rhapsodic than the prose of *The Birth of Tragedy,* but Nietzsche's *thought* is nonetheless very different from that of Plato and Aristotle. One small example will suffice. In the first section of his essay Nietzsche refers specifically to the happiness of beasts and children; in the first book of his *Ethics,* Aristotle specifically denies that children and animals can be happy. Nietzsche, then, can be said to admire ancient practice more than he admires ancient theory, which may be why the praise of Athens in his work gradually takes second place to the praise of Rome. What is more, he never thought that a return to more ancient ways was fundamentally possible. In other words, Nietzsche basically effects his critique of modernity from a radically modern, even postmodern perspective.

As the title suggests, Nietzsche's essay is a critique of a specific defect of his own age, which he refers to variously as "historical culture," "the historical movement," "the historical trend," and "the historical sense"—what later came to be called *historicism.* He believes that his own age suffers from the ravages of a historical fever. In criticizing historicism, Nietzsche also critically confronts Hegel, his great predecessor and Germany's philosopher of history. In the latter part of the essay he refers to a "certain famous philosophy," and proceeds to declare: "I believe that there has not been a dangerous turn or crisis in German culture in this century which has not become more dangerous because of the enormous, and still spreading, influence of this Hegelian philosophy" (*HSDL,* 8).

According to Nietzsche, Hegel regards contemporary humanity as the perfection of world history; his philosophy enshrines the sovereignty of history over other spiritual powers such as art and religion. For Hegel, "the climax and terminal point of the world process coincide with his own Berlin existence." Philosophers are not famous for fairness to their predecessors, and Nietzsche oversimplifies Hegel's thought; but the caricature he draws is sufficiently recognizable for him to argue for an opposing view. Against Hegel's doctrine that the historical process is a rational one which culminates in Hegel's own age in an "absolute moment" at the zenith, Nietzsche asserts that the historical process is not and cannot be finally completed.

The completion or fulfillment of history, he insists, is not merely impossible but undesirable; the end of history would inevitably lead to a degeneration of man. Moreover, according to Nietzsche, history is anything but rational; rather, it is demonstrably full of blindness, madness, and injustice.

Once again Nietzsche seems to emerge as the advocate of a premodern perspective and to be reverting to a viewpoint from which history becomes a realm of chance rather than a dimension of meaning. At first sight he seems to be harking back to Plato, who does not include history as a field of study for future philosophers, or to Aristotle, who regards history as inferior to poetry. Once again, however, the appearance proves deceptive. Closer analysis of *History in the Service and Disservice of Life* reveals that Nietzsche actually bases his criticism of Hegel on a crucial area of agreement with him.

The essay begins with a description of the life of animals, who forget each moment in time as soon as it passes. To live in bovine contentment, entirely in the present, unburdened by any memory whatever, means living *unhistorically.* By contrast, human beings remember the past and cannot escape from it; they live *historically.* What is more, they suffer from the awareness of the past and the passage of time, if only because the awareness of transience brings with it an awareness that human beings are imperfect and imperfectible. Happiness depends on our ability to forget, to surrender completely to the present. If we interrupt our total involvement in the moment to step back and contemplate our happiness, we have already abandoned some of the happiness subjected to contemplation. The man who lacks the ability to forget must resign himself to unhappiness, since he comes to see only flux and change, losing all fixed reference points by which to take his bearings.

At the same time, without a memory of the past human beings would not be human. Moreover, only by developing a historical sense and turning the past to the uses of the present does man rise above other animals and become truly man. Human beings enjoy indubitable advantages over beasts, as Nietzsche admits when he ascribes the wish to speak to his "contented cows." Humanity's problem therefore lies in finding the right balance between remembering and forgetting, the balance, that is, most conducive to a full human life. The degree and limits of memory must be fixed by the extent to which a human being can incorporate or absorb the past. A healthy organism instinctively assimilates as much—and only as much—of the past as it can digest; the rest it simply fails to see. The dividing line between the historical and the unhistorical is the horizon of the organism. Nietzsche assigns special importance to his teaching about horizons by promulgating in this connection the only "general law" of his essay on history. "No living

being" he asserts, "can become healthy, strong, and productive except within a horizon" (*HSDL*, 1).

A human being's horizon is constituted by his fundamental set of assumptions about all things, by what he takes, or mistakes, for the absolute truth which cannot be questioned. His historical knowledge must be surrounded by an unhistorical atmosphere, the darkness that limits the historical sense. The question arises at once as to the possibility of transcending one's horizon. Nietzsche admits this possibility in his account of the "supra-historical" man, but he makes it clear that the Olympian vision of such men leads to resignation rather than the productive activity that he associates with happiness. To see too much is to be consumed with a sense of life's meaninglessness. Nietzsche links the supra-historical view to traditional philosophy, and traditional philosophy to a life-disparaging despair. Toward the end of the essay, returning to the supra-historical in a more positive way, he mentions only art and religion. Here at the beginning, he takes care to follow his depiction of supra-historical man with the praise of history.

The proper sphere of history lies within and under an unhistorical atmosphere necessary for the conduct of a full and noble human life. As the title of the essay suggests, Nietzsche thinks that history can render a service as well as a disservice to human life. He writes of three kinds of history which can serve life. *Monumental* or exemplary history supplies models of greatness by its depiction of the great men and events of the past. It can be said to specialize in the heroic, singing as it does of giants on earth. *Antiquarian* history addresses itself to the preserving and revering instincts of human beings, imbuing them with a salutary love of tradition. Nietzsche regards antiquarian history as of special benefit to less favored people and races because it protects them from restless and unproductive cosmopolitanism. Finally, Nietzsche has some kind words for *critical* history, which places obsolete aspects of the past before the bar of judgment and condemns them. He praises this kind of history for bringing to light injustices surviving from the past so that they can be abolished in the interest of the present.

Anyone coming to *History in the Service and Disservice of Life* with the expectation of finding in it a judicious balance between the praise and censure of history will be disappointed to discover that Nietzsche is much more concerned with the latter than with the former. This is immediately apparent in a quick glance at the essay's contents, only two of whose ten sections deal with the "service" of history, the rest stressing its "disservice."

Moreover, even when Nietzsche, in the second and third sections of the essay, discusses useful kinds of history, he is quick to point out how easily these can be abused. Thus, the historical models of past greatness provided by monumental or exemplary history can work to obstruct the emergence

of present greatness. One can celebrate Lincoln in order to disparage later presidents; one can praise Shakespeare in order to condemn Yeats. The reverence for the past fostered by antiquarian history can act to stultify the present, since what is good comes to be associated too exclusively with what is old, and we may forget that tradition tends to preserve inconsistently or even incoherently. There is always the danger that critical history—which associates the old with the bad—may uproot more of the past than should be uprooted.

Nietzsche's ambivalence about history becomes even more striking when he suggests a link between the efficacy of each variety of useful history and its blindness to the truth, or at least to the whole truth. Monumental or exemplary history pays insufficient attention to the conditions necessary to the emergence of greatness. Implicitly, it argues that greatness is possible now precisely because it was possible in the past, which need not be the case. Moreover, it is hard to discover what monumental history can do which could not be done as well or better by plays and poems celebrating past heroes or events. In cultivating a general reverence for the past, antiquarian history becomes indiscriminate, praising past events that are in fact deserving of censure. Critical history, in turn, fails to realize the extent to which any present generation has been decisively influenced by the very past which it condemns. It constantly neglects to describe the judges of the past as the products of the past. In short, the uses of the past for the present depend upon a violation of the truth about the past. History in the service of life can never be scientific history.

Science, and the demand that history become a science, disrupt the proper relation between history and life. Throughout his essay Nietzsche emphasizes that the main function and primary justification of history is to serve life, which he characterizes as "that dark compulsive power, insatiably avid of itself." Historical science, however, is motivated by the desire to *know* rather than the desire to *serve* life; it thus forces on human attention more historical knowledge than humanity can properly assimilate. By so doing, history disrupts life, or at least favors declining life at the expense of ascending life.

Nietzsche presents his reader with a veritable catalogue of the calamities that result from an excess of history. Such excess proves hostile to life, first of all by creating the exaggerated inwardness from which moderns suffer, an inwardness to which nothing outward corresponds, and which destroys the organic harmony of the modern human being. Poets who write no poetry tend to proliferate, exonerating themselves by their manifest sincerity. The age deludes itself that it is being more just than previous ages when it is only being more complacent. The callow and jejune replace the truly mature. The affirmative stance toward life succumbs to a corroding self-irony

that deteriorates into cynicism, which in turn devolves into cunning but low egotism. . . .

The last calamity which Nietzsche discusses in this connection—the belief in the old age of mankind—causes him to engage Hegel's philosophy. Because of a surplus of historical details, modern man finds himself confronted by a spectacle so vast that he is bound to find it meaningless. He comes to think of himself and his fellow creatures as epigones, late arrivals on the scene for whom nothing whatever remains to be done. The best poems have all been written, the best fights all fought, the best thoughts all thought. If Hegel were right, if the end of history had in fact arrived, Nietzsche and his contemporaries would indeed be epigones, latecomers on the scene. Hegel is wrong, Nietzsche asserts, but the belief in Hegelianism makes men behave as though they were in fact epigones. Those who have no further tasks to accomplish, who believe that nothing epochal remains to be done, will inevitably degenerate, since they will lose what is best in them: their aspirations.

With such arguments Nietzsche manages to score some points against Hegel, but he can hardly be said to have refuted historicism. After all, neither the declaration that the historical process is rational nor the declaration that the historical process has been completed constitutes the most fundamental assertion of historicism. At its core, historicism declares the overwhelming importance of history, the essential determination of human life and thought by history, and the impossibility of transcending the historical process. Now, for the most part, Nietzsche accepts this core avowal, and his assertion as well as his acceptance indicate a crucial degree of agreement with Hegel. The calamities which Nietzsche describes so vividly, and which he attributes to excess of historical knowledge, amount to saying that an excess of history destroys the human horizon. But no permanent horizon for mankind exists. Our fundamental assumptions about all things—what we consider fixed points—are unevident, unsupported, historically variable, and historically determined. There are no eternal things and eternal truths; only flux and change exist. Toward the end of the essay, when he deals briefly with "doctrines of sovereign becoming," Nietzsche admits as much (*HSDL*, 9). These doctrines include evolution, which denies that there are any cardinal distinctions between men and beasts. They are true but they are also fatal. History as the science of universal becoming must be understood as both true and deadly.

If human life can thrive only within a certain fixed horizon which is accepted as absolute truth, but which in reality is merely one of many possible horizons, then human life requires illusions. Then, too, the propagation of truth becomes a life-threatening activity, for, by exposing horizons as *mere* horizons, one removes an essential condition for life. A deadly conflict exists between the demands of truth and the demands of life, or

between life and wisdom. In such a conflict, Nietzsche counsels that we should choose the side of life, if only because there can be life without wisdom, whereas there can be no wisdom without life.

That advice, however, solves very little. Life may demand illusions but it would seem quite impossible to accept an illusion once it has been perceived as an illusion. Myths retain usefulness only so long as one mistakes them for truth. Now, a horizon is our most comprehensive myth; it nurtures life, but only so long as we regard it as the final truth about all things. To see our horizon *as* a horizon means that we have transcended that particular horizon.

We might argue to the contrary, of course, by pointing to the phenomenon of myths that we still use even when they strike us as myths. For example, parents continue to send their children to Sunday school long after they have ceased to believe in the lessons taught there; in fact, they themselves continue to attend church long after they have lost their faith. Such practices do not necessarily entail hypocrisy; they simply attest to the fact that human beings, notorious for wanting their cake and eating it too, somehow manage to hold contradictory beliefs at the same time.

As a great psychologist, Nietzsche shows perfect awareness of such human frailties, but without approving of them. Continued acceptance of discredited horizons, he believes, involves a continual and degrading self-deception. One violates one's integrity, and Nietzsche, preeminently concerned with human ennoblement, sets an extremely high premium on integrity. This means that he opposes any ready resolution of the tension between life and wisdom by an accommodating preference for life. It also seems to mean that his thought founders on an impasse.

Yet *History in the Service and Disservice of Life* ends not in despair but on a note of triumph. In asserting an ultimate harmony between life and wisdom, it resembles later writings of Nietzsche—including *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*—in which nihilism eventually yields to celebration. After historicism's exposure of the arbitrary character of all human horizons, man finds himself subjected to an "infinity of hopeless skepticism," as Nietzsche puts it in the final section of the essay. But he professes to sight land: man can recover from the malady of history.

Such a recovery becomes possible only on the basis of a refutation of historicism, which must be shown either to be untrue, or at least incompletely true. Tentatively in *History in the Service and Disservice of Life,* and more comprehensively in his later writings, Nietzsche attempts to overcome and transcend the insights of historicism. He thus embarks on the most remarkable of his many remarkable journeys of thought: what begins as the questioning of the objective truth of historicism ends as a questioning of the very possibility of any and all objective truth.

Not every kind of history necessarily culminates in historicism; that fate is reserved for the kind of history that understands itself as, or pretends to be, scientific and objective. As a theoretical assertion, historicism depends on an examination of historical phenomena and assumes that it has comprehended the latter correctly. Nietzsche's attack begins with his doubts as to whether historical phenomena can be adequately understood by objective or scientific history and historians. He questions whether history will yield its secrets to disinterested inquiry. After all, it takes historical actors, also known as great men, to make genuine history. The makers of history all manifest their intense dedication, their steadfast commitment to a cause. The world-historical figures for whom Nietzsche has words of admiration—from Pericles and Alexander the Great to Luther and Napoleon—all acted within a horizon of commitment, unhistorically believing in the absolute validity of the goals they were pursuing. The great figures of history—world-historical men, as Hegel had labeled them—were the great creators, facing the future and devoting themselves to that which was to be. The greatest creators are those who create horizons within which future generations will live and flourish; from this perspective the traditional distinction between statesmen and religious founders simply vanishes. Great historical actors create such horizons unconsciously; they are subject to the nurturing illusion that they are merely discovering truth. This amounts to saying that all previous horizons, no matter how substantively different from each other, embodied a common belief in an absolute truth which can never be created but which may at privileged moments be discovered.

Can objective or scientific history do justice to world-historical actors and the events they shaped? Objective history stands or falls by its fidelity to its object; to use Ranke's terms, it must justify itself by its ability to present the past as it really was. Nietzsche approves of the ancient maxim that like can only be understood by like. Thus, only creative men and committed men confronting the future can understand the creations of the future-directed and committed heroes of the past. The objective historian does not fit this description. At best he criticizes, but he does not create; and he resolutely faces the past instead of the future. He ascertains facts, but does not penetrate to the essence of things. For example, a historian of art may well excel at establishing the dates of Michelangelo's birth and major productions, but only a fellow artist can really understand Michelangelo. Most objective historians, to be sure, would shrug off such criticism. They might say that Nietzsche has simply perpetrated a case of mistaken identity. They do not pretend to interpret the past, let alone evaluate it. Modestly they advance the modest claim that they simply set forth the uncontested or uncontestable facts. To them objectivity means no more, but also no less, than that.

Nietzsche exposes such rejoinders as illusions on the part of objective

historians, since ultimately an illusion, amounting to a delusion, lurks in the very word *objectivity*. Any statement about facts is already an interpretation of facts. Indeed, the very selection of data from a potential infinity of data already amounts to an interpretation. Historians evince naiveté by considering even the possibility of objectivity. For example, if they recount the story of a war, they must impose a beginning, a middle, and an end on the flow of facts; but this means that in one way or another they weight the facts on subjective grounds. The only alternative would be to assemble facts in something resembling a statistical abstract or a registry, but here too there would have to be an order, or at least a sequence of facts to be related. In the last analysis, then, one has no choice between objective and subjective history; all history is subjective. One does, however, have a choice between a noble, rich interpretation of the past and a base, impoverished one. So-called objective history stands exposed as arid subjectivity.

We must note that Nietzsche does not deny the validity of the insight that all horizons, far from being "the permanent horizon" of which philosophers have spoken at times, are human creations. He pursues a different strategy, attacking historicism as a particular interpretation of that insight.

Nietzsche attempts to transcend the apparent deadlines of the historicist insight by interpreting, or reinterpreting, it nobly. One does well to admit—or even assert—that the values by which human beings have lived in the past have been their own creations, fictions, or myths. On close inspection, however, this turns out to be an ambiguous fact, admitting of diverse interpretations. Nietzsche moves in the direction of viewing this insight as a revelation of human creativity and hence of human power. Philosophers have hitherto viewed man as the rational animal, but he now stands revealed as the animal—the only animal—who is able to create horizons. In the past, horizons have been created unconsciously, but the possibility now arises of consciously created horizons, horizons of a glory and splendor never before achieved in human history. No wonder, then, that Nietzsche is able to end his essay on history with such bright images of a wondrous human future.

This sketch of Nietzsche's views depends for its plausibility on a consideration of his work as a whole, which is to say that only hints of it can be found in *History in the Service and Disservice of Life*. Moreover, the questions raised by those hints can scarcely be said to be resolved by the essay. If horizons are the subjective creations of human beings, why do we not—why can't we—find, in principle at least, as many horizons as there are human beings? If horizons are free projects, how do we choose nonarbitrarily among different and differing horizons? The reader who wishes to follow Nietzsche's struggles with these questions must turn to the main body of Nietzsche's work; but a study of this early work should enable him to appreciate the importance Nietzsche persistently as-

signed to the historical process. Two instances from later work suffice to make the point. As previously indicated, Nietzsche's so-called middle period begins with *Human, All-Too-Human.* The very first aphorism of that lengthy work distinguishes between metaphysical and historical philosophy, and clearly places Nietzsche's own thought in the second category. The second aphorism explicitly charges philosophers with a lack of historical sense, a charge from which the author of the aphorism obviously considers himself exempt. The concern with history continues into the final stage of Nietzsche's thought, as we can see in *Beyond Good and Evil.* The seventh part of that work is entitled "Our Virtues," and the 224th aphorism deals with the historical sense, one of the two most prominent virtues of Nietzsche's time (the other is intellectual integrity) and of Nietzsche himself. One might additionally note the numerous references to history in the titles and subtitles of his books.

In short, Nietzsche couches his own philosophy in terms of a vast historical analysis; he deals with human history in order to place it in the service of life. His early essay sets an agenda for his own philosophical labors. And it is difficult to read his depiction of mankind as horizon-creating without seeing here the first stirrings of the doctrine of the Will to Power.

An exposition of Nietzsche's final teachings, the doctrines of the Will to Power and the Eternal Recurrence of the same, lies far beyond the scope of an introduction to this early essay. Suffice it to say that even the most sympathetic reader of Nietzsche may come away from a study of his work with grave doubts as to the way he answered the questions he asked of himself. The doctrine of the Will of Power may yield great insights into human nature; it may even be the best available account of human beings as creative. But what are they to create? According to Nietzsche, they must create the meaning of their lives. But does not meaning *mean* that there are things beyond the power of man to make, so that he can take his bearings by them? Nietzsche's answer to that question remains obscure. Needless to say, the doctrine of the Eternal Recurrence of the same muddies matters rather than clears them up. On the one hand, Nietzsche seems to regard the Will as sovereign, but if everything will happen again as it has happened before, the Will is revealed as impotent.

In the case of most philosophers, one can afford to respond with a benevolent shrug when told that his thought, in its totality, fails to persuade. Philosophy does not, like the sciences, have to progress over previous endeavors; one expects no more of it than that it once more pose basic problems. That toleration may well mask a certain contempt for philosophy as such, but other considerations as well should make one wary of giving Nietzsche every benefit of the doubt. First of all, he constantly asks to be judged as exactingly as possible; indeed, this side of his thought may con-

stitute its most enticing aspect. The very intellectual integrity which Nietzsche praises demands that we acknowledge the historical and intellectual link between him and fascism. The praise of cruelty, the loathing for the common man, the mockery of common decencies, the hallowing of war over peace—these and other excesses caused Nietzsche to become the one philosopher whose shrine was honored by Hitler himself. It would be foolish to deny that by abusing Nietzsche the Nazis, by exaggeration and misinterpretation, did him a great disservice; it would be almost as foolish to deny that Nietzsche's extreme views performed a real service for the extremists of the Right. The Nazis not only *abused* Nietzsche; they *used* him.

What then remains valuable and viable in the thought of Nietzsche? The answer must be that a great deal of Nietzsche remains viable, that he remains one of the greatest of cultural critics of Western civilization. What is still alive in Nietzsche's thought needs no commentary, for Nietzsche wrote with astonishing vigor and clarity. The insights seem almost to leap off the page, but it may be helpful, by way of conclusion, to indicate several of them.

To begin with, Nietzsche's strictures on modern academic life are still remarkably valid. The modern university, especially the modern American university, suffers from listlessness, above all in the humanities, Nietzsche's prime concern. The sciences flourish but the liberal arts decline, offering no grounding for the sciences and no guidance to their students. They are held in contempt and in truth they have become contemptible. Nietzsche saw and foresaw as much. He diagnosed the academy's rampant pedantry and its pitiful attempt to seek refuge in arid historical studies that can be justified before the bars of neither reason nor passion.

Those within the academy who specialize in castigating the society around them will find Nietzsche extremely helpful. His scathing comments on such phenomena as rootlessness, cynicism, and the overly scientific cast of mind anticipate whole battalions of modern Cassandras. He writes of the perils of conformity and other-directedness more beautifully than contemporary social scientists and depicts despair more profoundly than contemporary existentialists.

The radicals in the academy can take comfort in Nietzsche's pitiless dissection of bourgeois society. Those on the Right may find his condemnations refreshing because they so clearly emanate from the Right—and because Nietzsche's great competitor on the Left, Marx, cannot begin to match Nietzsche as prose stylist. Nietzsche condemns bourgeois society for its complacencies, its shameless reliance on the baser motivations of human beings, its petty yearnings, its bald abandonment of the poetic and the heroic. Though bourgeois society is anything but heroic, yet, when it possessed a crude but energetic self-confidence, it too once enjoyed a heroic

age. Bourgeois society has lost its certitudes. It no longer knows itself to be right, it no longer knows *what is right.* In other words, it has succumbed to relativism.

On this point, Nietzsche most clearly and very interestingly differs from Marx, who ascribes the crisis of bourgeois society primarily to material conditions and economic factors. Nietzsche, on the contrary, regards the crisis as spiritual. God is dead, mankind has lost its bearings. To those who attempt to find satisfaction in their relativism, understanding it as a sign of superiority over past times—a sign of great openness—he shows its inescapable links to nihilism.

It may, of course, be true that the antidotes to nihilism which Nietzsche, as physician of culture, prescribes are worse than the disease he diagnoses. The consequences of his thought are surely in many respects dangerous, but a thinker is not to be refuted by pointing to the dangerous consequences of his thought. Those readers who take Nietzsche seriously will discover that he holds up a dauntingly accurate mirror to his own time, the nineteenth century, but, no less importantly, to their own time as well.

History in the Service and Disservice of Life

FOREWORD

"Furthermore, I hate everything that merely instructs me without increasing or directly conferring life on my activity." With these words of Goethe,[1] as with a boldly expressed *ceterum censeo*,[2] our consideration of the worth and worthlessness of history may begin. Our purpose here is to show why instruction which fails to confer life upon—why knowledge which dampens—activity, why history as an extravagant intellectual excess and luxury, must arouse, in Goethe's words, our intense hatred. For we still lack our greatest necessity, and the superfluous is the enemy of necessity. To be sure, we need history, but not in the way the pampered dilettante in the garden of knowledge, for all his elegant contempt for our coarse and graceless needs and wants, needs it. I mean, we need history for life and action, not for the smug evasion of life and action, or even to gloss a selfish life and a base, cowardly action. Only insofar as history serves life do we wish to serve history. But history can be professionally practiced and valued to a degree that encourages the atrophy and deterioration of life—a phenomenon which, because of certain remarkable symptoms of our age, is as essential for us to diagnose as it may be painful to do so.

I have attempted to describe a feeling that has frequently tormented me; I take my revenge on it by making it public. Perhaps this description will give the reader opportunity to declare that he too is quite familiar with my feeling, but that I have failed to feel it with adequate purity and originality, that I have not expressed it with the confidence and maturity of experience which it requires. A few perhaps will so assert; but most will tell me that my feeling is completely perverted, unnatural, heinous, and positively illicit; and that by feeling it I have shown myself unworthy of the dominant historical orientation of our time—one which, as everyone knows, has been powerfully visible for two generations, especially among the Germans. In any case, by daring to step forward with the natural description of my feeling, I will be promoting, not injuring, the general respectability, insofar as I provide many with an opportunity to pay compliments to that historical orientation I mentioned. As for myself, I gain something of much greater value than respectability—I mean, being publicly instructed and corrected about our own time.

1. See Goethe's letter to Schiller, Dec. 19, 1798.

2. Thematic allusion to the celebrated sentence with which the elder Cato (the Censor) invariably capped his every speech to the Roman Senate: "Ceterum censeo Carthaginem esse delendam" ("I believe that Carthage must be destroyed").

These reflections are unmodern because I attempt to understand something of which our age is justly proud—its historical education—as a defect, an infirmity, a deficiency of the age. And because I also believe that we are all suffering from the ravages of historical fever and we should at least know what we are suffering from. But if Goethe was right in saying that we cultivate our faults along with our virtues; and if, as everybody knows, an excessive virtue—as the historical sense of our age seems to me to be—can destroy a people as easily as an excessive vice, then my reader might this once allow me to have my say. Also, by way of exoneration, I should not conceal the fact that the experiences which provoked these tormenting feelings in me were for the most part my own, and that the experiences of others are cited for comparison's sake. And furthermore that only insofar as I am the nursling of past ages—above all of the Greek past—could I, as a child of my age, have such uncontemporary experiences. But this much must be conceded me by virtue of my profession as a philologist. For I cannot imagine what would be the meaning of classical philology in our own age, if it is not to be unmodern—that is, to act against the age and, by so doing, to have an effect on the age, and let us hope, to the benefit of a future age.

1 Consider the herd grazing before you; aware of no yesterday, no today, it frolics about, feeds, sleeps, digests, and frolics again, from morning till night and from day to day, tethered by its pleasures and aversions, pegged to the moment, and therefore neither sad nor satiated. This spectacle is hard on man since he boasts of his superiority to the animals, but looks with envy on their happiness. His desire is futile because he refuses to be like them. He may ask the animal: "Why do you just look at me instead of telling me about your happiness?" The animal wants to reply, "Because I always immediately forget what I wanted to say"—but then it forgets even this answer and says nothing. Man is left to wonder.

But he wonders about himself, too, wonders that he cannot learn to forget, but always clings to the past; that however far or fast he runs, that chain runs with him. It is a wonder that a moment now here, now gone, a nothing before, a nothing afterward, still returns like a specter to disturb the calm of a later moment. Loose sheets from the scroll of time are forever falling out, fluttering away—and suddenly floating back into man's lap. Then the man says, "I remember," and envies the animal who immediately forgets and sees each moment really die, lapse back into fog and night and disappear forever.

So the animal lives *unhistorically.* Like a number that leaves no remainder, it merges entirely into the present, it knows nothing of dissembling, hides nothing, and always seems exactly what it is, and so cannot help being

honest. Man, on the other hand, struggles under the great and ever-growing burden of the past, which weighs him down and distorts him, obstructing his movement like a dark, invisible load, a load he can disown at times for appearances, and is only too glad to disown among his peers—in order to arouse their jealousy. And so the sight of a grazing herd or, closer to him, a child who does not yet have a past to disavow, who plays fenced in between past and future in blessed blindness, shakes him as though he remembered a lost paradise. And yet the child's play must be disturbed; only too soon will it be summoned from obliviousness. Then it learns to understand the phrase *it was,* the password that brings strife, suffering, and satiety upon man to remind him what his existence basically is—an imperfect tense that will never become perfect. And if death finally brings the forgetfulness he longs for, yet at one stroke it robs him of both the present and existence, and seals his realization that human existence is merely an uninterrupted past tense, a thing that lives by denying and consuming itself, by opposing itself.

If happiness, if striving for fresh happiness, is in any sense what binds men to life and urges them on to more life, then perhaps no philosopher is more right than any cynic. For the happiness of an animal, the consummate cynic, is living evidence of the truth of cynicism. The smallest happiness, if only it is uninterruptedly there and makes us content, is incomparably more than the greatest, which comes only episodically, like a mood or a wild inspiration, in the midst of sheer listlessness, yearning, or privation. But in the smallest and in the greatest happiness, there is always one element which makes it happiness: the power to forget or, in learned language, the power to feel *unhistorically* while it lasts. The man who cannot pause upon the threshold of the moment, forgetting the entire past, the man who cannot pivot on a tiny point like a goddess of victory, without dizziness or fear, will never know happiness, and even worse, will never do anything to make others happy. Take the most extreme example—a man who totally lacks the power to forget, who is doomed to see becoming everywhere. Such a man no longer believes in his own being, no longer believes in himself; he sees everything disintegrating into turbulent particles and becomes lost in this flux of becoming. Like a true disciple of Heraclitus,[3] he will end by scarcely daring to lift a finger. Forgetting is necessary to all activity, just as dark, as well as light, is necessary to all organisms. A man who wanted to live an utterly historical existence would be like a man forced to go without sleep, or like ruminant animals compelled to survive solely by chewing and re-

3. I.e., the sophist Cratylus, a young contemporary of Socrates. According to Aristotle (*Met.* 4.1010a.12), Cratylus took Heraclitus's doctrines to their logical extreme by asserting that since the universal Flux prevented the utterance of any truth, one should say nothing, merely wag his finger.

chewing their cud. That is, it is possible to live almost without memory, indeed to live happily, as the animals show us; but without forgetting, it is utterly impossible to *live* at all. Or to make my point still clearer: *There is a degree of insomnia, of rumination, of historical awareness, which injures and finally destroys a living thing, whether a man, a people, or a culture.*

To determine this degree and thereby the boundary beyond which the past must be forgotten if it is not to bury the present, we would have to know precisely how great is the *shaping power* of a man, a people, or a culture. I mean the strength to develop uniquely from within, to transform and assimilate the past and the alien, to recover completely from wounds, to redeem losses, and to refashion broken forms. There are men who possess so little of this strength that a single experience, a single pain, or, often and especially, a single subtle wrong, the tiniest scratch, makes them bleed helplessly to death. On the other hand, some men are so lightly troubled by life's most savage and terrible misfortunes, and even by their own evil deeds, that while these are taking place or soon afterwards, they achieve reasonably good health and a kind of peaceful conscience. The more strongly rooted a man's inner nature, the better he will assimilate or overcome the past; and if we imagine a man of the strongest and most exceptional nature, we would realize that in his case there would be no boundary beyond which his historical sense would overwhelm and injure him. He would summon up and engage the entire past, his own as well as that most alien to him, and transform it into his own blood. What his nature cannot master, he knows how to forget—for him it no longer exists. His horizon is closed and complete, and nothing has the power to remind him that beyond this horizon there are still men, passions, theories, and goals. It is a general law that no living being can become healthy, strong, and productive except within a horizon; if it is incapable of describing its own horizon and yet too selfish to enclose its vision within another horizon, then it will fall into feeble decline or perish prematurely. Cheerfulness, good conscience, joyful action, faith in the future—all these depend, in an individual as in a people, upon the existence of a line that separates the bright and lucid from unilluminable darkness, upon knowing how to forget at the right time as well as how to remember at the right time, upon sensing, vigorously and instinctively, when the historical and when the unhistorical sense is needed. This is the thought I ask my reader to consider: *The unhistorical and the historical are equally necessary to the good health of a man, a people, and a culture.*

It is common observation that a man's historical knowledge and perception may be severely limited, that his horizon may be as constricted as that of some inhabitant of an Alpine valley, that he may be unjust in all his judgments, and that he may, mistakenly, think himself the first to have his experiences—and yet, despite all his injustices and mistakes, he may stand there, invincibly healthy and vigorous, rejoicing every eye. By contrast, close

beside him stands a man far more just and knowing, who grows sick and collapses because the limits of his horizon are constantly shattered by fresh uncertainties; because he cannot untangle himself from the much finer strands of his rationalizations and truths in order to will and desire strongly. In contrast with the latter man, we saw the animal, totally unhistorical and living within a horizon no larger than a mere point, yet with a certain happiness, living at least without satiety and hypocrisy. We must therefore regard the capacity for a certain degree of unhistorical awareness as the more important and primordial capacity, since it provides the only foundation upon which any just, healthy, great, or truly human enterprise can develop. The unhistorical resembles an enveloping atmosphere; within its confines alone is life engendered, only to disappear again with the annihilation of this atmosphere. It is true that a man diminishes this unhistorical element when he thinks, reflects, compares, analyzes, and synthesizes, that inside this enfolding vaporous cloud a brilliant incandescence flares up. And it is therefore true that a man becomes human only by using the past for the purpose of life and by making history anew from events. But with a surfeit of history he stops again; without that unhistorical envelopment he never would have begun, and would never dare begin. What could a man possibly accomplish without first entering that vaporous region of the unhistorical?

Or, putting images aside in order to illustrate my point with an example, imagine a man seized and carried away by a violent passion for a woman or a powerful idea. What a transformation of his world! He becomes blind to what lies behind him, deaf and insensitive to all that is unfamiliar around him, but what he actually notices was never before so real, so palpably near, so colorful, resonant, or brilliant—as though he now grasped it with all his senses simultaneously. All his evaluations are so changed and debased he can no longer honor them, because he can scarcely feel them anymore. He asks himself why he has so long been the dupe of strange expressions, strange beliefs. He marvels that his memory turns ceaselessly in a single circle, yet he is too weak and tired to attempt even a single leap out of it. His is the most unjust condition in the world, narrow, ungrateful to the past, blind in the presence of dangers, deaf to warnings, a tiny, living whirlpool in a dead sea of night and oblivion. And yet this condition—unhistorical, antihistorical through and through—is the womb not only of an unjust act, but of every just act as well. No artist would ever paint a picture, no general would win a victory, no people would gain its freedom without first having longed for and struggled toward that end in such an unhistorical condition. Just as the man of action, in Goethe's phrase,[4] is always unscrupulous, so he is always ignorant too. He forgets almost everything in order

4. *Dichtung und Wahrheit,* 3:13.

to accomplish just one thing; he is unjust to what lies behind him, and he knows only one truth: what must be done now. Thus, every man of action loves his achievement immensely more than it deserves to be loved, and his superlative exploits happen with such exuberance of love that in every case they must be unworthy of it, even though otherwise invaluable.

If in many cases a man were capable of sensing and savoring the unhistorical atmosphere in which every great historical event begins, then perhaps this man, as a knowing being, might be able to elevate himself to a *supra-historical* vantage point—a vantage point that Niebuhr[5] once described as a possible result of historical reflection. He says: "When history is clearly and fully understood, there is at least one thing it is useful for. Through history we know what the greatest and loftiest human spirits do not know: how fortuitously they received the forms through which they see, and through which they forcibly demand that everyone else sees—forcibly because of the extraordinary intensity of their consciousness. The man who has not fully ascertained and comprehended this is in many cases enslaved by the appearance of a powerful spirit who imbues a given form with the loftiest passion." This vantage point described by Niebuhr would be called supra-historical because those who attained to it would no longer feel tempted to go on living or taking part in history, because they would have recognized that the one condition for all events is the blindness and injustice in the soul of the man of action. Henceforth, they would even be cured of taking history too seriously. Have they not learned to answer the question—for every man, for every event, whether among the Greeks or the Turks, whether from a day in the first or in the nineteenth century: How and why is life lived?

If we ask our friends whether they would want to relive the last ten or twenty years, we will easily recognize which of them are suited for that supra-historical vantage point. Very likely they will all say "No!" but they will give different reasons. Some may console themselves by saying, "But the next twenty years will be better." Of these David Hume says sarcastically,

> And from the dregs of life hope to receive
> What the first sprightly running could not give.[6]

These men we will call historical men. A glance into the past drives them

5. Georg Barthold Niebuhr (1776–1831), renowned German historian, author of a magisterial *Römische Geschichte,* who discovered the *Institutes* of Gaius as well as fragments of Cicero and Livy, which he edited. As a pioneer in the *scientific* study of history, he was generally regarded by Nietzsche with sternly critical disapproval.

6. David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion,* 10, ■ quotation drawn from Dryden's play *Aureng-Zebe,* iv, 1.

on toward the future, inflames their courage to go on living, kindles their hope that justice will someday come, that happiness lies hidden on the other side of the mountain they are approaching. These historical men believe that the meaning of human existence will be increasingly revealed in the *process* of life. Thus, they look backwards only in order to understand the present by reflecting on the processes leading to it, and to learn to desire the future even more acutely. In spite of all their history, they have no idea how unhistorically they think and act, and how their pursuit of history serves not pure knowledge, but life.

But there is still another answer to this question than the one we have just heard. Admittedly, it is another No! but its basis is different. It is the no of the supra-historical man who sees no redemption in process; for whom, instead, the world is complete, fully consummated, at every single moment. What could ten more years teach them that the last ten could not?

Now, supra-historical men have never agreed whether this idea implies happiness or resignation, virtue or repentance. But in contrast to all the historical deliberation of the past, they unanimously believe that past and present are one and the same, that they are archetypically equivalent in all their diversity, and, like omnipresent, imperishable types, are motionless forms of unchanging value and eternally equal meaning. Just as the hundreds of different languages conform to the same typically recurrent necessities of men, so that those who understand these necessities could learn nothing new from any of these languages, so too the supra-historical thinker illuminates the entire historical experience of peoples and of individuals from within himself, clairvoyantly divines the primordial meaning of the different hieroglyphs, and by degrees finally turns in exhaustion from this constantly rising flood of recorded scripts. How could he, in the endless profusion of events, avoid becoming satiated and more than satiated—indeed, nauseated? Finally, perhaps, the most daring of supra-historical men is ready, with Giacomo Leopardi, to say in his heart:

> Nothing is worth your moving.
> Earth is unworthy of your sighs. Life
> is bitterness and boredom, nothing more.
> And the world is foul.
> Now be still.[7]

7. The lines come from Leopardi's bitterly beautiful poem "A se stesso": "Non val cosa nessuna / I moti tuoi, nè di sospiri è degna / La terra. Amaro e noia / La vita, altro mai nulla; e fango è il mondo." For the poetry and prose of Giacomo Leopardi (1798–1837), Nietzsche, like Schopenhauer, felt intense admiration. Schopenhauer had seen in Leopardi the supreme contemporary poet of human unhappiness; and it was to Nietzsche, qua Schopenhauerian and author of *The Birth of Tragedy,* that Cosima Wagner's first husband, Hans von Bülow, dedicated his translation of Leopardi into German, which

Let us abandon these supra-historical men to their nausea and their wisdom. Today for once we want rather to rejoice in our unwisdom, and, like effective and progressive men, like men who venerate process, we want to enjoy ourselves. Our esteem for history may be merely a Western prejudice. If only we could progress at least within these prejudices, and not stand still! If only we could get better at studying history in pursuit of life! Then we would gladly admit to the supre-historical men that they are wiser than we are; that is, if only we could be certain that we have more life than they do. Then, in any case, our unwisdom would have more future than their wisdom. And now, to banish all doubts about the meaning of this opposition of life and wisdom, I will adopt the standing practice and directly advance some themes.

A historical phenomenon which is clearly and thoroughly understood, and which is resolved into a phenomenon of knowledge, is dead to the person who has understood it, because he has understood the madness, the injustice, the blind passion, and, in general, the whole dismal and earthly horizon of that phenomenon, and thence its historical power too. To the extent that he is a knower, this power has now become powerless in his hands, but to the extent that he is still alive, it is perhaps not yet powerless.

History, regarded as a purely scientific discipline and accorded supremacy, would resemble a balancing of the books of life and a liquidation of mankind's accounts. On the other hand, if historical scholarship is to be a beneficent enterprise, holding future promise, it must itself move in the wake of a fresh and powerful torrent of life—for instance, a newly emerging culture. History, therefore, must be guided and controlled by a higher power and must not itself guide and control.

Insofar as it serves life, history serves as an unhistorical power; and because of its subordinate function, it could never, and should never, become a pure science like mathematics. But the question of the degree to which life needs the services of history is one of the supreme questions, of supreme concern because it involves the health of a man, a people, or a culture. For there is a certain excess of history that causes life to degenerate and to be destroyed, and through this degeneration, history itself is finally destroyed.

2 But that life needs the services of history must be as clearly understood as the principle—to be demonstrated later—that too much history harms the living. In three respects history is relevant to the living. It is relevant to the man of action and ambition, to the man who

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Nietzsche cites here. Of Leopardi Nietzsche remarked (*WC*, 3.23 and note thereon) that he was "the modern ideal of a classicist" and one of "the last great followers of the Italian poet-scholars" (*RWB*, 10), and who, along with Merimée, Emerson, and Landor, could rightly be called "a master of prose" (GS, 92).

preserves and venerates, and to the man who suffers and needs liberation. These three relations correspond to the three kinds of history, insofar as we can distinguish between *exemplary*[8] or *monumental, antiquarian,* and *critical* history.

History is especially relevant to the energetic and powerful man, the man who fights a great battle, who needs exemplars, teachers, and comforters, and is unable to find them among his companions and contemporaries. History of this kind was relevant to Schiller, for, as Goethe observed, our age is so wretched that the poet no longer encounters qualities he can use in the human beings around him. Polybius, for instance, was thinking of the man of action when he called political history the proper preparation for government and the incomparable educator, which, by reminding us of the misfortunes of others, admonishes us to endure the vicissitudes of fortune without flinching.[9]

The man who has mastered history in this sense will be infuriated by the sight of curious tourists or scrupulous students of trivia clambering about on the pyramids of a great past. Here where he finds the inspiration to emulate and surpass this greatness, he has no desire to meet the dilettante in quest of amusement or excitement, who saunters through history as though it were some gallery of priceless paintings. In order to avoid feeling despair and disgust among these weak and impotent tourists, among these apparently active, but actually merely busy and agitated, companions, the active man looks to the past and, in order to catch his breath, interrupts his progress toward his goal for a while. But his goal is some happiness or other—not his own, perhaps, but usually that of a people or of all mankind; he shrinks from resignation and history is his remedy against it. For the most part, the only reward that can tempt him is fame, the hope of an honorable place in the temple of history—a temple where he in turn can become a teacher, comforter, and cautioner of those who come after him. His standard: anything that once had the power to extend and fulfill the idea of "man" more beautifully must also be always available in order to be perpetually capable of doing so again.

That the great moments in the struggle of individuals form a chain; that in them a great mountain ridge of mankind takes shape through the millennia; that the peaks of such long-lost moments might be still alive, still luminous, still great, for *me*—that is the crucial idea in the belief in humanity which the demand for *exemplary* history expresses. But this very demand—that greatness should be immortal—kindles the most frightful battle. Every

8. In German, *monumentalische.* Since English "monumental" fails to convey Nietzsche's particular inflection of the German, the word has here and there, as needed, been rendered as, or supplemented by, "exemplary."
9. Polybius *Histories* 1.1.2.

other living man cries out No! The monumental *shall* not reappear—that is the password. Lifeless custom, triviality, and vulgarity fill every cranny of the world; like a heavy, miasmal fog, they blur everything great, they occupy the path the great must take toward immortality—obstructing, deceiving, smothering, and suffocating them. But this path leads through human brains! Through the brains of frightened and transient animals who rise over and over again to the same needs and who are kept from deteriorating only briefly and with great effort. They want only one thing above all else: to live at any price. Who could imagine that the arduous torch-race of exemplary history is run amidst such men—the race without which greatness cannot survive!

And yet persistently a few men awaken—men who look back at greatness, are encouraged by reflecting on it, and feel themselves blessed, as though human life were a splendid thing, as though the loveliest fruit of this bitter plant were the knowledge that before them one man lived his life with pride and strength, another profoundly, and a third with compassion and benevolence—but all bequeathed the same lesson: the man who is ready to risk his existence lives most beautifully.

If the ordinary man clutches at his mortal span so morbidly and greedily, these great men, on their way to immortality and monumental history, knew how to treat it with Olympian laughter or were proud enough to disdain it. And they often climbed into their graves with an ironic smile—for what was left of them to be buried? Only what they had always regarded as mere ashes, refuse, as something vain and bestial, and which now lapses into oblivion after long exposure to their contempt. But one thing survives, the personal signature of their most inward nature—a work, a deed, a rare perception, a creation; it survives because future generations cannot do without it. In this, its most transfigured form, fame is even more than a supremely delicious sop to our vanity, as Schopenhauer called it.[10] It is the belief in the solidarity and continuity of the great men of all ages; it is a protest against the mere succession of generations and the brevity and transience of human life.

Of what use to the man of the present, then, is exemplary or monumental study of the past, the pursuit of what is classical and rare in the past? From this study he concludes that greatness was at least *possible* once, and therefore may be possible again. He goes his way with greater courage because the doubt that assails him in his weaker moments—that he is perhaps demanding the impossible—is now banished. Imagine a man who believes that you need only a hundred fruitful men, men educated and working in a fresh spirit, to do away with that "cultured" refinement which has now become so fashionable in Germany. How encouraged he must feel to see that the

10. See *Parerga and Paralipomena*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (Oxford, 1974), 1:449ff.

world of the Renaissance was raised aloft on the shoulders of a hundred such men.

And yet—to learn at the same time a lesson from the same example—how loose and tentative, how imprecise such a comparison would be! How many differences have to be overlooked before it can have that invigorating effect! How violently the uniqueness of the past has to be crammed into an abstraction, and all its angularities and edges smoothed away in the name of congruity! In point of fact, what was once possible could be possible again only if the Pythagoreans were right in their conviction that, given the same configurations of heavenly bodies,[11] earthly events must be repeated down to the minutest detail—so that every time the stars resume a certain pattern, a Stoic will conspire with an Epicurean and murder Caesar, and every time they reach another position, Columbus will discover America. Only if the earth always began its drama anew after the fifth act; only if it were certain that the same tangle of motives, the same deus ex machina, the same catastrophe would recur at fixed intervals, would the powerful man want exemplary history to repeat everything with utterly graphic *exactitude*—that is, to describe precisely the peculiarity and uniqueness of every fact—which is improbable unless astronomers become astrologers once more. Until then exemplary history will have no need for absolute accuracy. It will continue to approach dissimilar events, make generalizations about them, and finally declare them identical. It will persist in attenuating the diversity of motives and circumstances in order to present the *effects* as monumental—that is, as exemplary and worthy of emulation—to the detriment of the *causes*. Since monumental history therefore disregards causes as much as possible, there would be less exaggeration in calling it a collection of events that will affect every age. What we celebrate in public festivals, on days of religious or military commemoration, is really such an "effect in itself." It troubles the sleep of the ambitious; it lies like an amulet over the heart of the adventurous. But it is not the true historical *connexus* of causes and effects which, completely known, would only prove that its exact counterpart could never recur in the dice game of future and chance.

So long as the heart of historiography is the great *encouragement* a powerful man receives from it; so long as the past must be shown as worthy of emulation, as imitable and capable of repetition, it is doubtless in danger of being a little distorted, too favorably described, and, therefore, assimilated

11. See G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven, eds., *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge, 1960), 223. According to Eudemus, the Pythagoreans held that "the same individual things will recur, then I shall be talking again to you sitting as you are now, with this pointer in my hand, and everything else will be just as it is now, and it is reasonable to suppose that the time then is the same as now." The passage, one hardly needs to add, is plainly germinal to Nietzsche's later development of the idea of the Eternal Recurrence.

into free invention. Indeed, there are times when we simply cannot distinguish between an exemplary past and a mythical fiction, since precisely the same encouragement can be taken from the one world as from the other. So, if exemplary study of the past *prevails* over the other modes of consideration—I mean antiquarian and critical history—then the past itself is *damaged.* Large portions of it are neglected, despised, and washed away on the grey, monotonous tide of oblivion, out of which a few richly embellished facts emerge like islands. The rare man who surfaces at all seems a little unnatural and miraculous, like the golden thigh which disciples of Pythagoras claimed to see on their master.[12] Exemplary history is deceptive in the use it makes of analogies; by means of seductive similarities it provokes courageous men to rash action and enthusiastic men to fanaticism. And imagine the effect of such history on the minds and activities of talented egoists and fiery malcontents; empires would be destroyed and princes murdered; there would be wars and rebellions, and the number of historical "effects in themselves"—that is, effects without sufficient causes—would be constantly multiplied. But this reminder of the damage caused by exemplary history in the hands of powerful and energetic men, whether good or evil, is enough. Think also of its effect when it is usurped and exploited by weak and passive men.

Consider the simplest and most ordinary example. Think of effetely inartistic natures clad and armored with the exemplary history of art. At whom will they now aim their weapons? At their traditional enemies, the strong artistic spirits, hence at those who are unique in being able to really learn—that is, to learn to live—from that history and to translate what they learn into heightened purpose. For these strong artistic spirits the path is blocked and the atmosphere darkened when zealous idolaters dance around the shrine of some half-understood monument of a great past, as though they wanted to say: "See, this is real art, authentic art! What concern of yours is this new art that is now appearing?" This dancing swarm seems even to have a patent on "good taste," since the creative man is always at a disadvantage in comparison to the dilettante who merely looks and creates nothing, just as the beer-hall politician has always been more clever, more just, and more reflective than the statesman in power. But if the practice of referenda and majority rule is transferred to the world of art, and the artist forced to defend himself before a council of dilettantes, as it were, then we could solemnly swear in advance that he will be found guilty—and this not although, but *because,* his judges have solemnly proclaimed the canon of exemplary art (which means, according to our earlier explanation, art which "has had an effect" at all times). But for all art that has not yet become monumental or exemplary simply because it is contemporary art, the judges

12. See Diogenes Laertius *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* 8.11.

lack, first, need; second, genuine inclination; and third, precisely that authority of history. On the other hand, instinct tells these judges that art can be killed by art; they cannot tolerate a rebirth of the exemplary, and, to ensure that none will take place, they employ precisely that past art which has long been canonized as monumental. This is the method of connoisseurs, because they would like to eliminate art altogether. They pose as physicians while actually scheming to poison art. They hone their tongues and their tastes in order fastidiously to explain why they so persistently refuse all the artistic nourishment which the present might provide them. They do not want a rebirth of great art; their strategy is to say, "Look, we already have a great art!" Actually, this great art of the past is of no more concern to them than the art now being created—a fact to which their own lives bear witness. Exemplary history is the masquerade in which their hatred for the great and powerful artists of their own age appears as a complacent admiration for the great and powerful artists of the past. They use this disguise to transform the true meaning of monumental history into its opposite. Whether they recognize it or not, they nonetheless act as though their motto were "Let the dead bury the living."

Each of the three kinds of history is valid only in its own soil and its own climate; in any other soil it becomes a ravenous weed. If the man who wants to create any great thing has any need of the past, then he will take possession of it by means of exemplary history. Those men, on the other hand, who want to remain firmly within the bounds of hoary and venerable custom, will cherish the past as antiquarians. And only the man who is oppressed by a present need, the man who wants at any cost to rid himself of a burden, needs critical history—that is, history which judges and condemns. If these historical growths are carelessly transplanted, great damage is done. The critic without need, the antiquarian without reverence, and the authority on greatness with no capacity to be great, are such growths—plants that have run wild and, torn from their nurturing soil, have therefore degenerated into weeds.

3 Second, history is relevant to the man who preserves and venerates the past, who looks back with love and loyalty to his origins, where he became what he is. Through his veneration of the past he gives thanks, as it were, for his own existence. By cherishing with loving hands the remnants of the past, he means to preserve the conditions in which he grew up, for those who will grow up after him. And by so doing he serves life. In such a soul the possession of its ancestral patrimony[13] changes its meaning, for it is he, instead, who is possessed by this patrimony. Small, humble, fragile, old-fashioned things are endowed with dignity and

13. An echo of Goethe, *Faust*, part 1, 408.

sanctity when his antiquarian spirit, preserving and venerating, enters into them and makes itself a home and nest. His city's history becomes for him his own biography. He understands its wall, its towered gate, its laws, and its popular festivals as an illustrated diary of his youth, and he rediscovers himself in all of these things—finds in them his strength, his energy, his joy, judgment, follies, and improprieties. "Here men could live," he tells himself, "since men can live here now. And men will be able to live, because we are tough and can't be broken overnight." With this "we" of his, he looks beyond his fleeting, quaint, individual life and feels himself to be the spirit of his house, his kind, his city.

At times he even greets the spirit of his people across the vast distance of dark and confusing centuries as though it were his own. Empathy and a feeling for the future, a nose for almost obliterated traces, an instinctive capacity for reading accurately a past still concealed beneath many later layers, a quick understanding of palimpsests, indeed polypsests—these are his gifts and virtues. It was with such gifts that Goethe stood before Erwin von Steinbach's monument; in the storm of his feelings the historical veil of clouds separating them was torn apart, and he saw the German monument again for the first time, "exerting its effect out of the robust and rugged German soul."[14] It was this kind of feeling and impulse that guided the Italians of the Renaissance, and reawakened the ancient Italian genius in their poets to a "marvelous new resounding of the ancient lyre," as Jacob Burckhardt put it.[15]

But that antiquarian sense of historical reverence is of the greatest value when it fills the modest, coarse, even miserable conditions in which a man or a nation lives, with a simple, poignant feeling of pleasure and contentment. Niebuhr, for example, admits with genuine candor that he lived happily and with no regrets, without missing art, on moor and heath, with free peasants who possess a history. How could history better serve life than by binding less-favored races and populations to their native land and native customs, by settling them in one place, and preventing them from straying beyond their borders in search of better land, and competing for that in war? At times it seems as though stubbornness and unreason are the ties that bind the individual to these companions and environments, these tedious customs, these barren mountain ridges. But this is the healthiest, most generally beneficial sort of unreason—a fact known to everyone who recognizes the terrible aftermath of that adventurous migratory yearning which sometimes possesses a whole population, or who has studied the plight of

14. See Goethe's brief essay "Von deutscher Baukunst," dedicated to the "shades" (*dis manibus*) of Erwin von Steinbach.

15. Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S. G. C. Middlemore (Oxford, 1945), 153.

a people that has lost its loyalty to its past and succumbed to a restless cosmopolitan craving for the new and always newer. The opposite feeling, the satisfaction of a tree in its own roots, its happiness in knowing that it is not a wholly arbitrary and chance growth, but the inheritor, the blossom, and the fruit of a past, and that its existence is thereby excused and even justified—this feeling is what I now prefer to call the true historical sense.

Now, clearly this is not the condition likeliest to enable a man to reduce the past to pure knowledge. So in this case too we observe what we have already observed in regard to exemplary history, that the past itself suffers so long as history serves life and is governed by the instincts of life. Or, to put it more metaphorically: a tree can feel its roots better than it can see them, but it measures their size by the greatness and strength of its visible branches. If a tree could be wrong about its own roots, how much more wrong it will be about the whole surrounding forest! A forest which it knows and feels only as a hindrance or support—but nothing more. The antiquarian sense of a man, a township, or a whole nation always has an extremely limited visual field; it simply does not notice most things, and the little it does see, it sees in isolation and much too closely. It cannot measure anything, and hence regards everything as equally important, and hence each single detail as excessively important. Furthermore, there is no criterion of value and no sense of proportion for the things of the past which would really do them justice in relation to each other; invariably there are only the measurements and proportions applied to things by the antiquarian individual or nation looking back at them.

There is always an immediate danger in this. In the end every old or venerable thing that is still part of our visual field is simply accepted as equally venerable, while everything that fails to welcome the ancient with reverence—that is, everything new, everything emerging—is rejected and condemned. In the plastic and graphic arts even the Greeks tolerated the old hieratic style alongside a freer and greater style. Indeed, they later not only tolerated the pointed noses and the frozen smiles, they even honored them as refinements of taste. When a people's sensibility hardens in this way; when history serves the life of the past so that it undermines further life and, above all, higher life; when the historical sense no longer preserves life but embalms it—then the tree dies unnaturally, withering from the top slowly downward to the roots—and finally the roots themselves usually die. The moment antiquarian history is no longer inspired and quickened by the vigorous life of the present, it degenerates. Now piety withers, the scholarly habit persists without piety, revolving egoistically and complacently about its own center. Then we witness the revolting drama of a blind mania for collecting things, an incessant, restless accumulation of everything which has ever existed. The man envelops himself in mustiness. By this antiquarian behavior he succeeds in degrading an even more significant talent, a nobler

need, into an insatiable craving for the new, or, more accurately, for the old, for everything old. Frequently he sinks to the point where he is satisfied with any fare, and devours dusty bibliographical trivia with gusto.

But even if this degeneration fails to occur, even if antiquarian history does not lose the ground in which it must take root in the service of life, the danger that it may become too powerful and suffocate the other modes of viewing the past always remains. It understands merely how to *preserve* life, not how to create life; hence it always undervalues becoming because it lacks the divining instinct for it—the instinct which exemplary history, for instance, possesses. Hence antiquarian history impedes the powerful resolve for the new; hence it paralyzes men of action who, precisely because they are men of action, always will, and always must, offend against some piety or other. The fact that a thing has acquired age now creates the demand that it should last forever. For if we add up the experience accumulated in such things—an old ancestral custom, a religious belief, an inherited political right—during the course of their existence; if we add up the cumulative piety and reverence felt by individuals and generations, then it seems rash or even ruthless, to set such a past aside for a new present, and to compare the single, one-time fact of things present and becoming to the cumulative multiplicity of past pieties and old reverence.

By now it is clear how urgently man often needs to supplement the exemplary and antiquarian modes of viewing the past with a *third,* the *critical* mode; and that he needs this too in life's service. In order to live, man must possess the strength, and occasionally employ it, to shatter and disintegrate a past. He does this by haling that past before a tribunal, interrogating it carefully, and in the end condemning it. But every past deserves to be condemned, for this is how it is with human things: human violence and weakness have always been potent in them. It is not justice that sits in judgment here; even less is it mercy that here pronounces the verdict; but life alone, that dark, compulsive power, insatiably avid of itself. Its verdicts are always unmerciful, always unjust, because they never flow from a pure fountain of knowledge. But in most cases justice herself would pronounce the same verdict, "for everything that comes into being *deserves* to perish. It would be better if nothing began."[16]

It takes very great strength to be able to live and to forget to what degree living and the practice of injustice are synonymous. Luther himself once supposed that the world began only through an oversight of God; that is, if God had thought of "heavy artillery," he would not have created the world. But at times the same life that requires this forgetfulness also requires its periodic abolition. Then it becomes extremely clear precisely how unjust it is that certain things—a privilege, a caste, or a dynasty, for instance—exist

16. Goethe, *Faust,* part 1, 1339–41.

at all, and how thoroughly they deserve destruction. It is then that we consider its past critically; then that we attack its roots with a knife; then that we cruelly trample on all the pieties of the past. The process is always dangerous, dangerous even to life itself. Men or ages that serve life in this way, by judging and destroying a past, are always dangerous and always endangered. For since we happen to be the products of earlier generations, we are also the products of their blunders, passions, and misunderstandings, indeed, of their crimes; it is impossible to free ourselves completely from this chain. If we condemn those blunders and exempt ourselves of guilt for them, we cannot ignore the fact that our existence is rooted in them. At best we create a conflict between our inherited, ancestral nature and our knowledge, and perhaps even a revolt of a strict new discipline against what was long ago inbred and inborn. We plant in ourselves a new habit, a new instinct, a second nature, so that the first nature withers. It is an attempt to give ourselves a past a posteriori, as it were, a past from which we prefer to be descended, as opposed to the past from which we did descend—always a risky task since it is so difficult to set limits to this rejection of the past, and because second natures are generally weaker than first natures. Too often we know the good but fail to do it because we also know the better but are incapable of doing it. But now and then a victory does occur, and for those who struggle, for those who use critical history in the service of life, there is significant consolation in knowing that even this first nature was once a second nature, and that every victorious second nature will become a first.

4 Such are the services that history can render to life. Every man, every nation, requires, according to its goals, strengths, and necessities, a certain knowledge of the past, a knowledge now in the form of exemplary history, now of antiquarian history, and now of critical history. What is never needed is a crowd of pure thinkers merely observing life, or individuals hungry for knowledge who are satisfied by knowledge only, whose sole purpose is the increase of knowledge. What is always needed is history whose aim is life and which must therefore be subject to the authority and ultimate control of life. That this relation to history—one created by hunger, governed by the degree of need, and limited by the inward shaping power of an age, culture, or nation—is the natural one; that knowledge of the past in every age is desirable only insofar as it serves the future and the present, and does not weaken the present or eradicate a vital future—all this is as simple as the truth is simple and is immediately convincing to anyone who does not first insist upon historical proof.

And now glance quickly at our own age! We recoil in shock. What became of all the clarity, all the naturalness and purity of the bond between life and history? How confusing, exaggerated, and disturbing is this problem now

looming! Are we, the observers, to blame? Or has the old constellation of life and history really been altered by the intervention of some powerfully malignant star? Let others prove our perception false; we will say what we think we see. Actually, just such a star, radiant and magnificent, has intervened; the constellation of life and history has really changed—*because of science,* because of *the demand that history be a science.* Life alone no longer dominates and limits the knowledge of the past. Instead, all the boundary markers have been knocked down, and everything that ever was now plunges down upon man. As far back into the past as becoming reaches, back into infinity, all perspectives have shifted. No past generation has ever seen so boundless a spectacle as that which history, this science of universal becoming, now presents to us; but this spectacle is also presented to us with history's dangerously bold motto: *fiat veritas, pereat vita.*[17]

Now let us imagine the spiritual effect this science has had on the soul of modern man. Historical knowledge constantly overwhelms him from its inexhaustible sources; strange, disconnected facts crowd upon him; memory throws open all its doors but cannot open them wide enough; he does his best to welcome, sort out, and honor these alien guests, but they quarrel with each other, and it seems that man must conquer and subdue them all lest he himself perish in their quarrels. Accustoming himself to this rowdy, boisterous, quarrelsome household gradually becomes second nature, though there can be no doubt that this second nature is much weaker, much more nervous, and in every way less healthy than the first. In the end modern man carries around with him an enormous load of these indigestible stones of knowledge, which then at every opportunity, as the fairy tale has it,[18] rattle loudly inside his stomach. This rattling reveals modern man's most characteristic trait. And that is the strange contrast between an inward nature that has no corresponding exterior, and an exterior nature that lacks a corresponding interior, a contrast unknown to the ancient world. Knowledge consumed to excess, in the absence of hunger, and even against a man's need, is now powerless to transform or make itself manifest, but remains concealed in a certain chaotic inner world which modern man, with curious pride, calls his characteristic "inwardness." He says of course that he possesses content and lacks only the appropriate form; but this is a wholly unnatural disjunction for any living thing. Our modern culture is not a living thing precisely because it cannot be understood without this dissociation; that is, it is not in fact a real culture, but merely a kind of knowledge about culture. It stops at the thoughts and sentiments of culture, but never becomes cultural resolve. What actually motivates modern man instead, and becomes externally visible as action, usually means little more than a trivial

17. "Let truth be done, though life perish."
18. Grimm, "The Wolf and the Seven Little Goats."

convention, a pitiful imitation, or even a coarse caricature. His feelings then doze inside him like the snake that swallowed rabbits whole, stretches out peacefully in the sun, and avoids all unnecessary movements. The inward process: this is the real thing today, this is "genuine" culture. The casual observer can only hope that this kind of culture does not die of indigestion.

Imagine a Greek, for instance, happening on a culture of this kind. He would notice that for modern man the terms *educated* and *historically educated* are apparently so close that they mean the same thing and differ only in the number of words. If this Greek then observed that a man might be well educated and yet historically ignorant, we would shake our heads in disbelief, as though we had not heard him rightly. That famous small people of the not-so-remote past—I mean the Greeks—had, during the period of their greatest vigor, stubbornly preserved an unhistorical sense; if a contemporary were magically transported to the Greek world, he would probably find the Greeks very "uncultured"—which would clearly expose the carefully concealed secret of modern culture to public ridicule. We moderns, in point of fact, possess nothing which is truly ours. Only by stuffing, and overstuffing, ourselves with alien customs, ages, arts, philosophies, religions, and perceptions do we become worthy of notice, that is, as walking encyclopedias, as which we might perhaps be regarded by a Greek of the archaic period marooned in the modern world. But with encyclopedias everything of value lies within, in the contents, not on the outside, on the binding and jacket. And so all of modern culture is essentially inward; on the cover the binder has stamped some title like "Handbook of Inward Culture for Outward Barbarians." Indeed, this contrast between inward and outward makes the exterior even more barbaric than would be the case if a primitive people had developed solely on its own according to its own harsh needs. How else could Nature cope with the excessive richness of the past pouring in upon it? Only by one means, that is, accepting it as superficially as possible, in order to dispose of it rapidly and reject it. Hence the habit of not taking real things seriously; the "weak personality," which prevents reality and existence from making a deep impression. In the end we become outwardly ever more lazy and self-indulgent, and the dangerous gulf between form and content is widened until we become insensitive to our own barbarism; memory is always freshly stimulated, there is a constant flow of new things, things worth knowing, which can be stored away in the drawers of our memory.

The culture of a people as the opposite of that barbarism has been defined, appropriately, I think, as unity of artistic style in all the vital manifestations of a people. This definition should not be taken to imply an opposition between barbarism and beauty of style. A people to whom we attribute a culture must be a vital unity in every aspect of reality; it cannot be wretchedly fragmented into inward and outward, or form and content.

If you want to establish and foster a national culture, then establish and foster this higher unity, and devote your efforts to destroying modern "culture" in the name of true culture. Have the courage to consider how a nation's health, damaged by history, can be restored; how its instincts, which means its integrity, can be recovered.

I want to speak directly only about ourselves, about contemporary Germans. More than the people of any other nation we suffer from this weakness of personality, from this dissonance between form and content. Among Germans form is commonly regarded as a convention, a disguise, and a fiction. If we do not hate it, we certainly do not love it. It would be still more accurate to say that we have an extraordinary fear of the word *convention* and even more of convention itself. In this fear the Germans deserted the school of the French, because they wanted to become more natural and thereby more German. But it now seems that they miscalculated with this "thereby." Having escaped the school of convention, they simply let themselves follow their own inclinations wherever they led, and imitated sloppily, indiscriminately, and almost mindlessly what we once painstakingly and often successfully imitated. So, even today, we still live, as compared with earlier times, by a slovenly and incorrect French convention, as revealed in our mode of walking, standing, speaking, dressing, and dwelling. While we believed we were escaping to naturalness, we merely chose freedom from restraint, our own convenience, and the smallest possible degree of self-mastery. Merely wander through a German city. Every stylistic convention, in comparison with the distinctive national traits of foreign cities, reveals itself in a negative way. Everything is colorless, decrepit, badly copied, slipshod; everyone does as he wishes, not from vigorous and deliberate desire, but according to laws prescribed in part by the universal haste, in part by the prevalent passion for comfort. A piece of clothing requiring no ingenuity to design, whose making costs no time—therefore clothing borrowed from abroad and copied with extreme sloppiness—is immediately viewed by Germans as a contribution to German fashion. The feeling for form is flatly rejected by Germans, and ironically: because they have a *feeling for content.* Aren't they, after all, a nation famous for its "inwardness"?

But a notorious risk also exists in this inwardness. The content itself, which we assume to be completely invisible from the outside, might someday evaporate. And neither its disappearance nor its earlier presence would be outwardly apparent. Yet even supposing that this danger to the German people is extremely remote, there is still truth in the foreigner's reproach that our inner life is too weak and chaotic to act externally and achieve form. Our inner life, however, is quite capable of being sensitive, serious, powerful, intense, good, and perhaps even richer than the inner life of other peoples. But as a whole it remains weak because all those fine individual strands are not interwoven into a single hard knot. Consequently, our visible

acts are not the complete action nor manifestation of our inner life but merely a crude, weak effort by one or two strands to represent the whole. This is why we simply cannot judge a German by his behavior; even after he has acted, he remains completely concealed as an individual. He must, as we know, be measured by his thoughts and feelings, and these are now expressed in his books. If only these books of his did not make it more doubtful than ever that his famed inwardness still resided in its inaccessible little temple. It would be frightful to think that this inwardness may someday disappear, leaving only that exterior—now arrogantly clumsy, now meekly indolent—as the distinguishing mark of the German. Almost as frightening to find that inwardness was still there, concealed from view, disguised, rouged and retouched, that it had become an actress, if not something worse! So Grillparzer, for instance, a detached and reflective observer, seems to conclude from his dramatic and theatrical experience. "Our feelings are abstract," he says, "we hardly any longer know how our contemporaries express their feelings. We let our feelings kick up their heels with an extravagance unknown today. Shakespeare has spoiled all us moderns."[19]

This is an individual case, and generalization may be premature. But how monstrous this generalization would be if proven accurate, if the individual cases too often imposed themselves upon the observer! How desperate would be the statement that a German's feelings are abstract, that we have all been spoiled by history—a statement that would utterly destroy every hope of a future national culture. For every hope of this kind grows from a faith in the authenticity and immediacy of German feeling, from a faith in our unimpaired inwardness. What have we to hope for, or believe in, if the spring of our belief and hope is muddied, if our inwardness has learned to kick up its heels, dance, paint its face, express itself abstractly and with calculation, and gradually dissipate? And how can a great, creative spirit exist among a people no longer certain of its inward coherence, and divided into an educated class whose inwardness has been crippled and corrupted, and an uneducated class of inaccessible inwardness? How can he exist if people have lost all solidarity of feeling; if he also knows that the feelings of those who consider themselves educated and claim to provide the nation's artists, are false and corrupt? Even if there are a few individuals here and there whose judgment has become more refined and sophisticated—this does not compensate him. It torments him that he must address himself to a mere sect, as it were, and is no longer deeply necessary to his people. Perhaps he will now prefer to bury his treasure, since he loathes being pretentiously patronized by a sect while his heart feels compassion for all. His people's instinct no longer turns toward him; it is futile for him to

19. Grillparzer, *Sämtliche Werke* (Stuttgart, 1872), 9:187. The quotation has been slightly altered.

stretch longing arms toward them. What can he do now but turn his inspired hatred against that limitation which obstructs him, against those barriers raised by the so-called culture of his people, in order at least to condemn, as judge, what for him, a vital and creative spirit, is destruction and degradation? So, for the godlike joy of creator and benefactor, he exchanges a profound insight into his fate, and ends as a lonely wise man, a disgusted sage. It is the most painful of spectacles; anyone who sees it will recognize in it a sacred urgency. He tells himself that help is needed, that the higher unity in a people's spirit and nature must be renewed, and that this gulf between inward and outward must, under the hammer blows of necessity, once again disappear. But how can he possibly help? All that is now left to him is his profound knowledge. By expressing, by diffusing, by strewing this knowledge from heaping hands, he hopes to plant a need: from strong need strong action will someday emerge. Lest there be the slightest doubt as to what I mean by this necessity, this need, this knowledge, I hereby explicitly declare that it is *German unity* in its highest sense to which we aspire, and we aspire to it more passionately than to political unity—*the unity of German spirit and life, after we have annihilated the gulf between form and content, between inwardness and convention.*

5 In five respects, it seems to me, an excess of history in a given age is hostile and dangerous to life. For it is through such an excess that the gulf between the inward and outward life, already discussed, is created, and personality thereby weakened. Through this excess an age falls victim to the conceit that it possesses, to a higher degree than any other age, that rarest of virtues—justice. Through this same excess, a people's instincts are disturbed, and both the individual and the whole society are prevented from maturing. Through this excess is distilled the belief, always damaging, that mankind has grown old, that we are its epigones and the product of its old age. Through this excess an age falls into a dangerous attitude of self-irony, and from that into an even more dangerous state of cynicism. But in a state of cynicism, an age increasingly ripens toward cunning and egoistical behavior by which the vital forces are paralyzed and finally destroyed.

To return now to our first proposition. Modern man suffers from a weakened personality. Just as a Roman of the Empire ceased to be Roman in regard to the world he had conquered; just as he lost himself in the inrush of the foreign, and degenerated in that cosmopolitan carnival of gods, arts, and customs, so modern man—who makes his historical artists prepare for him the feast of a continual world's fair—must suffer a similar fate. He has become a spectator wandering around and enjoying himself, reduced to the point where even great wars and great revolutions barely succeed in changing his condition for a moment. Even before the war is over, it has already

been converted into a hundred thousand pages of printed paper; it has already been served up as the latest appetizer for the jaded palates of these historical gluttons. It seems almost impossible that a richer or stronger tone can be produced even with the most intense plucking of the strings. It promptly fades away, and in the next moment it already has a historical ring, delicately volatilized, impotent.

In moral terms: you can no longer maintain the sublime; your deeds are not rolling thunder now but sudden bursts. Accomplish great and wonderful things, they will still go down to Hades, silent and unsung. For the moment you stretch the canopy of history over your actions, art shuns you. The man who wants immediately to grasp, assess, and understand something in matters where he should, with prolonged emotion, experience the incomprehensible as the sublime, can be called rational, but only in the sense in which Schiller speaks of the reason of rational men. He cannot see things that even a child can see; he cannot hear the things that even a child can hear,[20] and these are surely the most important things. This means: he has destroyed and lost his instinct; he can no longer rely on his "divine animal," giving it free rein when his intellect vacillates and his way leads him through desert regions. So the individual becomes hesitant and uncertain, and can no longer believe in himself. He sinks down into himself, into his inwardness, or in this case into the cumulative wasteland of his knowledge, which has no outward effect, of learning which fails to become life.

Look at modern man's exterior and you will see how the expulsion of his instincts by history has almost transformed him into pure abstractions and shadows. No one any longer dares to risk his own person, but wears the mask of the cultured man, a scholar, a poet, a politician. If we take hold of these masks, in the belief that they are serious and not merely farce—for they all flaunt their seriousness—we suddenly find ourselves holding nothing but patches and tatters.

So we must refuse to be deceived, we must order them to take off their coats, or be what they seem! The authentically serious man must not become a Don Quixote; he has better things to do than tilt with such fictitious realities. He must rather scrutinize each mask closely, cry out "Halt! Who goes there?" and rip off the disguise.

Strange! One would think that history would encourage men to be *honest* above all—even if only to be honest fools. And this has always been its effect, but this is so no longer. Historical learning and the garb of bourgeois uniformity together prevail. Although "free personality" was never more glowingly spoken of, we see no personality at all, much less free personality, but merely mass man in his timid disguise. The individual has retreated inward; outwardly we see nothing more of him. And this makes us wonder

20. See Schiller, *Die Worte des Glaubens.*

whether there can in fact be causes without effects. Or do we require a generation of eunuchs to guard the great historical world-harem? Certainly pure objectivity is superbly suited to eunuchs. But it almost seems as though their task is to watch over history so that nothing comes of it except precisely more histories—surely not events!—and to prevent personalities, by means of history, from becoming "free," that is, sincere with themselves, sincere with others, both in word and deed. Only through this sincerity will the distress and inner misery of modern man be exposed. And then art and religion, like true helpers, will be able to replace that conformity and timid masquerade whose sole purpose is concealment, and jointly plant a culture that answers man's true needs and does not merely teach us, like modern culture generally, to lie about these needs, and thus become walking lies.

In an age that suffers from general education and culture, how unnatural, artificial, and utterly unworthy is the condition in which Philosophy, that goddess of naked sincerity, must find herself! In this world of enforced outward conformity, she remains a learned monologue of the man who walks alone, the chance prey of the individual who hunts her, a secret hidden in the study, or the innocent chatter of academic greybeards and children. No one dares fulfill in himself the law of philosophy, no one lives philosophically with that simple, manly loyalty that compelled an ancient, wherever he was and whatever he did, to act like a Stoic, once he had promised loyalty to the Stoa. All modern philosophizing is political and policed, limited to a learned specter by governments, churches, academies, and the customs and cowardices of men.

It stops with a wistful "if only" or the notion of "once upon a time." Whenever philosophy becomes more than ineffectual, inward knowledge, she is banned from the fold of historical culture. If only modern man were courageous and resolute, if only he were not, even in his hatreds, an inward creature, he would banish her. So he contents himself with prudishly disguising her nakedness. To be sure, he thinks, writes, publishes, speaks, and teaches philosophically—up to that point almost everything is permitted. Only in action, in what is called life, is it different. Here only one thing is permitted and everything else is simply impossible. Historical culture requires this. Are these still men, we ask ourselves, or perhaps only machines for thinking, writing, and speaking?

Goethe once said of Shakespeare: "No one despised the outward garb more than he. He knows the manner of the inner man all too well, and here all men are alike. He is said to have portrayed the Romans superbly. I disagree. They are simply flesh-and-blood Englishmen, but they are certainly men, real men, and the Roman toga fits them well."[21] Now I ask whether there is the slightest possibility of portraying our present literati,

21. See Goethe, "Shakespeare und kein Ende," 1.

popular leaders, functionaries, or politicians as Romans? Absolutely not, because they are not men, but merely incarnate compendia and, as it were, concrete abstractions. If they have a character and style of their own, it is all so deeply concealed within them that it can never emerge into the light of day. If they are men, they are men only to those who "examine their innards." To all others they are something else, not men, not gods, not animals, but products fashioned by history, fashioned through and through, mere image, form without demonstrable content, but unfortunately only bad form, and uniform at that. And so the reader should understand and ponder my thesis: *Only strong personalities can endure history; the weak are completely annihilated by it.*

Why? Because history confuses those feelings and sensibilities that are insufficiently vigorous to measure the past by themselves. The man who is afraid to trust himself, who instead instinctively interrogates history about his feelings—"How should I feel here?"—gradually, out of fear, becomes an actor and plays a role, very often many roles, and therefore performs each one badly and superficially. Gradually all congruence between a man and his historical area disappears. We see saucy little schoolboys treating the Romans as though they were their equals; and they dig and burrow in the remaining fragments of the Greek poets as though even these *corpora* were ready for them to dissect and were mere *vilia*—as their own literary *corpora* well may be.[22] One of them, let us say, is busy with Democritus; but the question always comes to my lips: Why Democritus? Why not Heraclitus? Or Philo, or Bacon? Or Descartes? And so on. And then: Why a philosopher anyway? Why not a poet, an orator? And why a Greek at all? Why not an Englishman or a Turk? Isn't the past great enough to find something in it that doesn't make you appear so ridiculously arbitrary? But, as I said, they are a generation of eunuchs. To a eunuch any woman is as good as another, merely a woman. Woman-in-Herself, the eternally unapproachable. So it does not matter what they study, so long as they—who could never themselves make history—keep history nicely "objective." And since the Eternal Feminine[23] will never draw you heavenward, you drag her down to your own level, and, being neuters yourselves, take history to be a neuter, too. But lest someone suppose I am seriously comparing history with the Eternal Feminine, let me make it clear that I rather regard history as

22. Sarcastic play on the plural of Latin *corpus*—"body" or "body of work," i.e., literary oeuvre. The philologists dissect the corpus of Greek lyric poetry as though it were—like their own writings—"cheap" stuff.

23. Goethe, *Faust*, part 2, 1,210–11. "Das Ewig-Weibliche / Zieht uns hinan" (The Eternal Feminine / Draws us upwards). The Eternal Feminine is the driving inspirational force behind earthly existence, and the impulse to human transcendence. Compare Dante's "Love that moves the sun and the other stars."

the Eternal Masculine; though for those who are in the fullest sense "historically educated," it can be no great matter whether it is masculine or feminine. For they themselves are really neither masculine nor feminine, nor even epicene, but always and only neuters, or, in more cultured terms, simply the Eternal Objective.

Once personalities have been snuffed out, in the manner described, by being reduced to eternal nonsubjectivity, or, in our terms, "objectivity," nothing can any longer affect them. Suppose something good and just happens: an action, poetry, music. Immediately the man who has been hollowed by education passes over the work and inquires about the author's biography. If the author has already done several things, he must immediately submit to an interpretation of his past development and the putative course of his future development; he is immediately compared to other authors, analyzed, dissected in regard to his choice of material and his handling of it, and then cleverly put back together again and generally chastised and reprimanded. No sooner does something remarkable occur than the historical neuters come crowding around, always ready to supervise the author from a great distance. There is an immediate echo, but it is always a "critique," whereas a little earlier the critic did not even dream of the possibility of such an achievement. At no point does the work produce an effect, but always and only another critique; and the critique itself has no effect in turn, but is simply subjected to a new critique. It is moreover agreed that many critiques are the same as a positive effect, and only a few or none a failure. But basically, despite this "effect," nothing has changed. People of course chatter for a while about some novelty, but later about some newer novelty, and in the meantime everyone does what he has always done. The historical education of our critics does not in fact permit a work to achieve a genuine effect; that is, to affect life and action. No matter how bold and black the penmanship, they immediately blot it; the most graceful design is smeared with their thick brushstrokes, which are viewed as corrections, and that again is the end of it. But their critical pens never cease flowing because they have lost control of them, and instead of guiding them are guided by them. Precisely in this excessiveness of critical effort, in this lack of self-mastery, in what the Romans call *impotentia,* the weakness of the modern personality is revealed.

6 But let these weaknesses be. Pose instead an admittedly painful question about modern man's highly acclaimed strength. Does modern man's famous historical "objectivity" give him the right to call himself strong, that is to say, *just*—juster in a higher way than men of other ages? Is it true that the course of his objectivity lies in an increased need and longing for justice? Or does this objectivity, as the effect of utterly different causes, merely give the impression that justice is the cause of its

effect? Does this objectivity, by flattering us too much perhaps, lure us into a pernicious prejudice about the virtues of modern man?—Socrates thought it was a misfortune verging on madness for anyone to imagine himself in possession of a virtue and not possess it. And this illusion is surely more dangerous than its opposite, that of suffering from a flaw, a vice. For thanks to this delusion we still might improve ourselves, whereas the former illusion makes a man or an age become daily worse—which means, in this case, more unjust.

Clearly, no one has a higher claim on our reverence than the man who possesses the instinct and the strength for justice. For in him the highest and rarest virtues are combined and concealed, just as an unfathomed sea absorbs the rivers flowing into it from every source. The hand of the just man with the authority to pass judgment no longer trembles while holding the balance. Stern with himself, he adds weight to weight; there is no flicker in his eyes as the scales rise and fall; and when he proclaims the verdict, there is no harshness or quavering in his voice. If he were a cold demon of knowledge, he would radiate the icy halo of a terrible superhuman majesty, which we would have to fear, not revere. But the fact that he is a man, still trying to rise from indulgent doubt to a stern certitude, from mild tolerance to the imperative "You must," from the rare virtue of generosity to the rarest virtue of all, justice; the fact that he now resembles that demon of knowledge, although from the very beginning he has been only an ordinary human being; and, above all, the fact that in every moment he must constantly expiate his own humanity, the tragic victim of his own impossible virtue—all this lifts him to a solitary height as the *most venerable* exemplar of the human species. For what he wants is truth, not merely as cold, inconsequential knowledge, but as an ordering and punishing judge; truth, not as a private, individual possession, but as the sacred authorization to pull up all boundary stones of egoistic possession—truth, in short, as the Last Judgment, as anything but the captured prey and plaything of the individual hunter. Only insofar as a truthful man possesses the absolute will to be just, is there any greatness in the aspiration for truth that the world so mindlessly glorifies. Whereas in the eyes of less clear-sighted men a whole host of quite different impulses—curiosity, fear of boredom, envy, vanity, frivolity—which have nothing whatever to do with truth—are confused with that aspiration toward truth which has its roots in justice.

Hence, the world indeed seems full of those who "serve the truth." Yet the virtue of justice is very rarely found, even more rarely recognized, and almost always hated with deadly hatred, whereas the regiment of seeming virtues has always been accorded honor and pomp. Few men, in truth, serve the truth, because only a few men possess the pure will to be just; and even among these only a very few possess the strength to be capable of justice. In fact, the will to be just is not enough; and man's worst miseries are the

result of justice that lacks discernment. This is why the general welfare demands above all else that the seeds of judgment be sown as widely as possible so as to distinguish between fanatic and judge, and to recognize the difference between the blind desire to be judge and the ability to judge. But how can we possibly develop such discernment?—Hence, when you speak to men about truth and justice, they persistently, timidly, vacillate, doubtful whether a fanatic or a judge is speaking to them. So we should forgive them for always welcoming, with especial kindness, those "servants of truth" who lack both the will and the strength to judge, and who impose upon themselves the task of seeking knowledge which is "pure and without consequences," or more bluntly, a truth which amounts to nothing. There are many indifferent truths; there are problems whose solution costs no effort, let alone sacrifice. In these safe and indifferent areas, a man undeniably succeeds in becoming a cold demon of knowledge. But despite this! Even if, in especially favored times, whole regiments of researchers and scholars are transformed into such demons, it is still unfortunately possible that such an age suffers from the lack of great and strict justice—lacks, in short, the most noble kernel of the so-called passion for truth.

Now look at the historical virtuoso of the present. Is he the justest man of this time? True, he has cultivated in himself a sensibility so subtle and sensitive that nothing human is alien to him. Radically different times and people immediately arouse sympathetic echoes in his lyre. He has become a resonant passivity, whose vibrations in turn influence other passive natures of his kind, until finally the whole atmosphere of an age throbs with these delicately related, crisscrossing resonances. Yet it seems to me that, of every original, basic historical tone, we hear only, as it were, the corresponding overtones. The harsh, powerful quality of the original can no longer be inferred from the shrill, ethereal vibration of the echoing strings. The original tone usually awakened actions, anxiety, and terrors, whereas the echo lulls us to sleep and turns us into flabby sensualists—as though Beethoven's *Eroica* had been adapted for two flutes for the benefit of dreaming opium smokers. From this we may infer what value for these specialists is to be assigned to modern man's loftiest claim, his pretense to a higher and purer justice. This virtue of justice never has anything pleasant about it; it possesses no exciting vibrato; it is hard and terrible. Compared to this justice, how low magnanimity stands in the scale of virtues—that magnanimity which is the property of only a few, rare historians! But far greater is the number of those who only get to tolerance, to recognizing what can no longer be denied, to tidying and prettying up the past, with moderation and benevolence, on the cunning assumption that the novice reader will be led to think that an account of the past which lacks harsh tones and expressions of hatred is the virtue of justice. But only superior strength can judge;

weakness must be tolerant, unless it wants to feign strength and transform regal justice into a comic actor.

Now there still remains another frightful species of historian—good, decent, honest, serious fellows, but narrow-minded. Here we find the same strong desire to be just, the same judicial pathos; but all their verdicts are false for roughly the same reason that the decisions of ordinary juries are erroneous. How improbable, therefore, is any frequency of historical talent, even if we leave aside altogether those disguised egotists and partisans who assume very objective appearances in order to conceal their dirty games. So too we discount the truly mindless crowd of those who write history in the naive belief that all the popular views of their own age are true, and that to write in conformity with the age is quite the same as being just (a belief which sustains all religions and on which, in religions, nothing more will be said). These naive historians say that "objectivity" means judging past opinions and accomplishments by the standard of current public opinions; this is their sole criterion of all truth. Their job is to accommodate the past to the triviality of the present. Conversely, all historiography that refuses to accept these popular opinions as canonical, they call "subjective."

But might there not be an illusion in even the loftiest interpretation of the word *objectivity*? For in this sense the word implies a state of mind in the historian in which he contemplates an event so purely, with all its motives and all its consequences, that it has no effect on his subjectivity. It connotes that esthetic phenomenon, that detachment from personal interest by which a painter, in a stormy landscape threatened by lightning and thunder or on an angry sea, perceives his own inner image; it connotes complete immersion in things. But it is superstitious to suppose that the image which things reveal to a man so attuned reproduces their empirical reality. Or are we to suppose that in these moments things actively sketch, paint, or photograph themselves, so to speak, upon a purely passive mind?

This would be a mythology, and a bad mythology at that. Besides, this would mean forgetting that for the artist these are the most powerful and spontaneous moments of creativity, compositional moments of the highest kind, whose result will be a painting that is clearly artistically but not historically true. To envisage history objectively in this way is the quiet work of the dramatist and consists in imagining everything at once, in weaving isolated particulars into a whole, always on the supposition that a unity of design must be imposed on the material if it does not inhere in it already. This is how man spins his web over the past and masters it, this is how he manifests his artistic instinct—but not his instinct for truth or justice. Objectivity and justice have nothing to do with each other. We can imagine a historical writing utterly devoid of simple empirical truth, but which can still make the highest claim to objectivity. Indeed, Grillparzer boldly asserts:

> What else is history but the way in which the spirit of man assimilates *impenetrable events*; in which he combines things whose relationships only God could know, and replaces the unintelligible with the intelligible; in which he introduces into a whole his own concept of an external purposiveness when there is only an internal purposiveness, and, what is more, assumes chance where a thousand little causes are at work? Every man simultaneously has his own particular necessities, so that millions of paths, crooked and straight, run along side by side, intersecting, reinforcing, and impeding one another, striving forwards or backwards, thereby assuming vis-à-vis each other the character of chance, and in so doing (apart from the influence of natural events) making it impossible to demonstrate the effective and comprehensive necessity of what happens.[24]

But it is precisely this necessity which ought now to be revealed as a result of that "objective" view of things! If stated as a historian's article of faith, this assumption can only assume a very odd form; Schiller of course is quite clear about the essentially subjective nature of this assumption when he remarks of the historian, "One phenomenon after another begins to emerge from blind chance and lawless freedom, and to take its place as a proper part of a harmonious whole—*which exists, however, solely in the historian's conceptualization.*"[25]

But what are we to think of the following assertion by a famous historical scholar—an assertion introduced with such conviction and balanced so nicely between tautology and absurdity? "It cannot be denied that all human action and behavior are subject to the course of events, events which are trivial and often undetectable, but powerful and irresistible." In an assertion like this the cryptic wisdom is no more evident than the obvious inanity, as in the maxim of Goethe's court gardener "Nature can be forced, but not compelled," or in the sign on a booth at the fair described by Swift: "Here is the largest elephant on earth, except for itself." What inconsistency is there after all between the activities of man and the course of events? I am particularly struck by the fact that historians like the one cited above cease to instruct as soon as they begin to generalize, betraying in their obscurity the sense of their weakness. In other disciplines generalizations are the crucial factor since they contain laws. But if such assertions as that cited are meant to be valid laws, then we could reply that the historian's work is wasted. For whatever truth is left in such statements, after subtracting that

24. A conflation of two different passages from Grillparzer, *Sämmtliche Werke*, 9:129 and 140.

25. A quotation from Schiller's inaugural lecture (May 26, 1789) as professor of history at Jena.

mysterious and irreducible residue we mentioned earlier, is obvious and even banal since it is self-evident to anyone with the slightest range of experience. But to make whole nations uncomfortable and devote years of tiresome labor to this effort would be like constantly amassing experimental evidence in the natural sciences when existing evidence is sufficient to establish the law in question—a pointless, supererogatory effort which, incidentally, according to Zöllner,[26] plagues modern natural science. If the value of a play lay solely in its final, governing theme, then the play itself would be the most lengthy, roundabout, and tiresome means of attaining its goal. And so I hope that history may discover that its meaning is not general ideas as the final fruit of its effort, but that its value lies precisely in the spirited retelling, enhancing, and heightening of a familiar or even ordinary theme, an everyday tune, into a comprehensive symbol, and thereby intimating in the original theme the presence of a whole world of profound meaning, power, and beauty.

But to achieve this requires above all a great artistic power, a creative buoyancy, a loving immersion in empirical data, a poetic elaboration of given types. Clearly this means objectivity, but objectivity of a positive kind. So often, however, objectivity is merely a verbal expression. In place of that imperturbable calm of the artist's gaze, inwardly flashing but outwardly dark and impassive, we get an affectation of calm, just as an absence of feeling and moral strength habitually disguise themselves as a piercing coolness of observation. In some cases that banality of mind, that vulgar wisdom, which solely by virtue of its own boredom creates the impression of disinterested calm, sallies forth disguised as that artistic state of mind in which the subject becomes silent and disappears from sight altogether. Then there is an effort to suppress everything that might excite, and the driest word is precisely the right word. Indeed, it is even thought that a man to whom a past moment *is of no concern whatever* has a vocation to describe it. This is often the relation that exists between classicists and the Greeks; neither has any relevance to the other—and this, too, is then called "objectivity." But when it is a case of describing precisely the noblest and rarest things, then this deliberate, pretentious indifference, this calculatedly cold and pedestrian exposition, is utterly revolting—when, that is, the historian's *vanity* drives him to this indifference posing as objectivity. Moreover, our judgment of these historians should be based specifically on the principle that a man is vain precisely to the degree that he lacks intelligence. No, at least be honest! Don't affect the appearance of that artistic power which can truly be called "objectivity"; don't pursue the semblance of justice unless you are dedicated to the terrible mission of justice. As though it were the duty of each age to be just to everything in the past! Besides, no age or generation ever has the right to

26. Johann Karl Friedrich Zöllner (1834–82), German astronomer.

pass judgment on all preceding ages and generations. This uncomfortable mission falls only and always to individuals, and only to the rarest among them. Who then compels *you* to judge? And then too—ask yourselves if you could be just, even if you wanted? As judges you must stand above what you are judging, whereas you have merely come later. The last guest to arrive at the table rightly deserves the last place, yet you want the head of the table? But in that case at least do the noblest and greatest deed. Perhaps then, even though you come last, a place will really be found for you.

Only from the highest power of the present can you interpret the past. Only by the most vigorous exertion of your noblest qualities will you sense what in the past is great and worth knowing and preserving. Like for like!

Otherwise you drag the past down to your own level. Do not trust history unless it springs from the most extraordinary mind; the quality of the historian's mind becomes apparent whenever he has to express a general truth or restate a familiar truth. The true historian must have the power of making the familiar sound like something wholly new, and of stating universal laws with such simplicity and profundity that we overlook the simplicity because of the profundity, and the profundity because of the simplicity. No man can be a great historian, an artist, and a simpleton at the same time. But those drudges charged with the task of carting, storing, and winnowing do not deserve our contempt simply because they cannot become great historians. Still less should we confuse them with great historians. Rather, we should recognize them as the journeymen and apprentices required for their master's service, just as the French, for example, with greater innocence than is possible for Germans, used to speak of "les historiens de M. Thiers."[27] These workers should eventually become great scholars, but they can never, by dint of diligence, become masters. The same hat easily fits both a great scholar and a simpleton.

In sum, only men of experience and superiority can write history. The man whose experience is not higher and greater than all other men's cannot understand the greatness and sublimity of the past. The past always speaks with oracular voice. Only as master builders of the future, who understand the present, will you comprehend it. The only conceivable explanation we can now offer for the extraordinarily deep and pervasive influence of the Delphic oracle is that the priests of Delphi were scrupulous students of the past; we must now recognize that only those who build the future have a right to judge the past. By looking ahead, by setting a great goal for yourself, you also master that excessive analytical drive which now devastates your present and makes all calm, all peaceful growth and ripening impossible.

27. Louis Adolphe Thiers (1797–1877), French statesman and historian. His reputation as a historian rests mainly upon his ten-volume *Histoire de la révolution française* and his immense (and diffuse) *Historire du Consulat et de l'Empire.*

Enclose yourself in a great barricade of hope, a hopeful striving. Form a mental image to which the future must correspond and forget your false conviction that you are epigones. You have enough to think about and discover as you meditate on that future life; but don't ask history to show you how and by what means. If, instead, you revive in yourselves the biographies of great men, they will teach you the highest commandment of all, to ripen and escape the paralyzing spell of modern education—whose true purpose is *not* to let you ripen, in order to control you and exploit you in your unripeness. And if you want biographies, shun those books with titles like *The Life and Times of*———, and choose instead a biography subtitled *A Fighter against His Time.* Steep your mind in Plutarch and dare to believe in yourself as you believe in his heroes. With a hundred men educated in this unmodern way, that is, with men who have ripened into themselves and are accustomed to the heroic, we could reduce the whole noisy sham of modern culture to eternal silence.

7 When the *uncontrolled* historical sense prevails and reveals all its implications, it uproots the future by destroying illusions and depriving existing things of the only atmosphere in which they can live. Historical justice, even when applied in a true and pure-hearted way, is therefore a frightening virtue because it always undermines and destroys living things. Its judgment is always a destruction. If no constructive urge is at work behind the historical urge; unless demolition and clearing away are carried out in the hope that a future, already alive in hope, may build its home on the cleared ground; if justice alone rules, then the creative instinct is weakened and discouraged. A religion, for instance, which is converted into historical knowledge under the jurisdiction of pure justice, a religion thoroughly and scientifically analyzed, will also finally be destroyed by this process. The reason is that historical research inevitably reveals so much falsehood, coarseness, inhumanity, absurdity, and violence that the compassionate atmosphere of illusion, indispensable to everything that wants to live, necessarily vanishes. But only in love, only in the shadow of the illusion of love, does man create; that is, only when he believes unconditionally in perfection and truth. A man who is unconditionally forced to surrender love is severed from the roots of his own strength; he inevitably withers, that is, becomes dishonest.

In such effects art is opposed to history. And only when history can be transformed into a work of art—that is, become pure artistic creation—can it perhaps preserve or even awaken instincts. But such historiography would be wholly at odds with the analytical and anti-artistic temper of our times; indeed, it would be regarded as a perversion of it. But history which, unless guided by a constructive instinct, only destroys, eventually makes its instruments jaded and unnatural. For such men destroy illusions, and "the man

who destroys illusion in himself and others is punished by Nature, the strictest of all tyrants."[28]

For a while, of course, one may take up the study of history quite ingenuously and unconsciously, as though one vocation were as good as any other. Modern theology in particular seems to have devoted itself to the study of history out of pure naiveté, and even now it tries to ignore the fact that by so doing it serves, no doubt quite unwillingly, Voltaire's *Écrasez [l'infâme].* No need to assume, behind this theological concern with history, the existence of fresh, vigorous, and constructive instincts; otherwise we would have to accept the so-called Protestant League as the matrix of a new religion and perhaps the jurist Holtzendorff[29] (who edited and introduced what has been widely dubbed as the Protestant Bible) as John the Baptist by the River Jordan. This innocence will perhaps for some time be propagated by Hegelian philosophy, still smoldering on in the heads of the older generation through its distinction between the "idea of Christianity" and its many imperfect "phenomenal forms," thereby allowing us to believe that the "passion of the Idea" is to reveal itself in ever purer forms, and finally to attain its purest, most transparent, indeed almost invisible, form in the mind of the contemporary *theologus liberalis vulgaris.*[30] But if one listens impartially to what this supremely purified form of Christianity says about the earlier impure forms of Christianity, he often gets the impression that the subject is not so much Christianity, as—well, what are we to think when we find Christianity described by the "greatest theologian of the century" as the religion which can "empathize with all actual religions and other merely potential religions," and when the "true Church" is necessarily a church which "becomes a fluid mass in which there are no extruding parts, in which every part is found at every point, and everything tranquilly blends together"—again, what are we to think?

What can be learned from Christianity is that it has become apathetic and unnatural through historicizing treatment, and in the end a totally historical—that is, a just—treatment has now reduced it to pure knowledge about Christianity, thereby destroying it. This same process can be observed in connection with any living thing; its life ceases when completely dissected; it becomes painfully sick the moment we begin to dissect it historically. There are men who believe in the healing, revolutionary, and reforming influence of music among Germans. To them it is an outrage and a crime against what is most vital in our culture that composers like Mozart and

28. This passage from Goethe is taken word for word, along with alterations, from Eduard von Hartmann, *Die Philosophie des Unbewussten* (Berlin, 1869), 620.
29. Franz von Holtzendorff (1828–89), jurist and professor at Berlin and, later, Munich, an authority on civil and criminal law.
30. "ordinary liberal theologian"

Beethoven should now be swamped by the learned zeal of biographies and tortured by historical criticism to yield the answers to a thousand impertinent questions. Is not a man's living influence destroyed or at least paralyzed long before being exhausted, when curiosity is directed to the countless trivial aspects of his life and work, and intellectual problems are sought precisely where we should learn to live and forget all problems? Imagine transporting a few of these modern biographers to the birthplace of Christianity or the Lutheran Reformation; their cold, pragmatic curiosity would be just enough to render every spiritual *actio in distans*[31] quite impossible—just as the most pitiful animal can, by eating the acorn, prevent the mightiest oak from sprouting. Every living thing needs a surrounding atmosphere, a shrouding aura of mystery. If this shroud is removed, if a religion, an art, a genius is condemned to move like a star without an atmosphere, no wonder they soon harden, dry up, and cease to bear. So it is with all great things "which never without some illusion prosper," as Hans Sachs puts it in *Die Meistersinger.*

But every nation, indeed every man, that wants to reach *maturity* needs such an enveloping illusion, such a protective, concealing cloud. Yet at present we hate the process of becoming mature because we honor history more than life. Indeed, we rejoice in the fact that "scientific methods are beginning to govern life." Conceivably this may happen. But surely a life so governed is nearly worthless, since it is far less *life,* and promises far less life for the future, than the life which was once governed not by knowledge, but by instinct and vigorous illusions. But this age of ours should certainly not be, as observed earlier, one of complete, fully developed and harmonious personalities, but one of shared and, as much as possible, productive labor. In other words: men must be adapted to the goals of the present so they can be put to work as soon as possible. They must labor in the factory of public utility before maturing, indeed in order to keep them from maturing—because maturity would be a luxury that would subtract a quantum of energy from the "labor market." There are birds which are blinded to make them sing better; I am not convinced that modern man sings more beautifully than his grandfather, but I do know that he has been blinded in his youth. And the instrument, the vile instrument, which is used to blind him is knowledge and learning, a *light* which is *too bright, too sudden, too varied.* A young man is literally flogged through the millennia; boys utterly ignorant of war, diplomacy, and the politics of commerce are presumed to be worthy of instruction in political history. But just as the young race through history, so we moderns race through art galleries or listen to concerts. We may well feel that one concert sounds different from another, or that one affects us differently from another, constantly losing our sense of surprise, no longer

31. "action at a remove," i.e., "distanced action"

being awed by anything, and, finally, being pleased with everything—this is now called the historical sense, historical culture.

In plain words, young minds are so overwhelmed by the mass of material imposed upon them, so enormous, astonishing, barbaric, and violent, so "tangled into hideous knots," that they can save themselves only by deliberate apathy. In those of finer and stronger sensibility, another symptom may even appear—nausea. In this way the young person is alienated, he becomes suspicious of all traditions and ideas. Now he knows that every age is different, what you're like changes nothing. In depressed indifference he discards one opinion after another, and he understands what Hölderlin felt when he read Diogenes Laertius on the lives and teachings of the Greek philosophers;: "Here I have once again experienced something I have often noticed before, that the transience and mutability of human ideas and systems affected me almost more tragically than those tragedies which are usually called the only real ones."[32]

No, so overwhelming, stupefying, and violent an exposure to history is surely unnecessary to youth, as the ancients demonstrate; and it is exceedingly dangerous, as the moderns demonstrate. But now consider the student of history, the heir almost from childhood of a precocious apathy. Now, for his own work he has acquired the "method," the right touch and the superior tone, of his master; a totally isolated little chapter of the past has fallen victim to his acumen and the method he has learned. He has already produced, or to put it more arrogantly, he has already "created"; he has now actually become a servant of the truth and a master of the world-domain of history. If he was already "accomplished" as a boy, he is now overaccomplished; we need only shake him and his wisdom falls into our arms with a plop. But the wisdom is rotten, and every apple has its worm.

Believe me: if men must labor in the factories of scientific scholarship before they ripen, then scholarship itself will be ruined as swiftly as these factory slaves whom it employs all too early. I regret having at this point to use the jargon of slave-owners and bosses to designate relationships which should properly be viewed as free of utility and exempt from life's necessities. But the words *factory, labor market, supply, productivity*—notice how these expansions of egoism sound—come spontaneously to the lips when one wants to describe the most recent generation of scholars. Solid mediocrity becomes ever more mediocre; scientific scholarship is becoming, in an economic sense, ever more profitable. Actually the youngest scholars are wise in one respect only, though in this wiser than all the men of the past, but in every other respect they are only immensely different—to put it mildly—from all scholars of the old school. Nonetheless, they demand honor and benefits, as though the state and public opinion were obliged to

32. See Hölderlin's letter to Isaak von Sinclair, Dec. 24, 1798.

accept this new currency contract and decree that genius is superfluous—by restamping every teamster a genius; but a later age is likely to see that their structures were only collectively carted, not collectively built. I would say clearly and plainly to those who tirelessly sound the modern cry to battle and sacrifice—"Division of labor!" "Join the ranks!"—that if you want to promote scientific scholarship as swiftly as possible, you will also ruin it as soon as possible, just as pullets are ruined by being forced to lay too many eggs unnaturally.

Admittedly, scholarship in recent decades has advanced remarkably fast, but look at the scholars too, all those exhausted pullets. They cackle more than ever, not because their natures are more "harmonious," but because they lay eggs more frequently; yet their eggs have become increasingly small (but their books have gotten bigger). The natural and final result of this process is the universally applauded "popularization" (along with "feminization" and "infantization") of scholarship; that is, the infamous fitting of the garment of scholarship to the body of the "general public"—to make deliberate use of tailor's German to describe a tailor's task. Goethe saw in this an abuse and called upon the scholarly disciplines to affect the outside world only by means of a higher practice. Moreover, older generations of scholars had good reason to regard this abuse as oppressive and burdensome. For equally good reasons the younger scholars find it quite easy, since, aside from their little niche of knowledge, they themselves are a part of the general public and share its needs. Simply by settling comfortably into their chairs, they manage to open up their own little field of study to the compulsive curiosity of the general mixed public. They then term this act of accommodation "the modest condescension of the scholar to his public," but in fact that scholar, insofar as he is not learned but vulgar, has only condescended to himself.

No matter how you conceive of the "people," you can never form a concept sufficiently noble and lofty. If you regarded the people as capable of greatness, you would be compassionate with them, and would take care not to offer them your historical *acquafortis*[33] as a rejuvenating elixir of life. But in your heart of hearts you think poorly of them, since you cannot, deeply and sincerely, respect their future. And you act like practical pessimists; that is, like men living with the presentiment of disaster—men who have grown indifferent and careless about the welfare of others, indeed, even about their own. "If only the earth will still support *us*! But if it no longer will, that's all right too." Thus they feel, and live, an *ironic* existence.

8 It may seem very odd, but surely not contradictory, that I should attribute to our age, so accustomed to loud and en-

33. Diluted form of nitric acid.

thusiastic outbursts of reckless jubilation over its historical culture, a kind of *ironic self-consciousness,* a haunting suspicion that there may be no reason for rejoicing, a fear that all the enjoyment of historical knowledge may soon be done with. A similar puzzle regarding individual personalities has been provided us by Goethe in his remarkable study of Newton. He discovers at the base (more precisely, at the peak) of Newton's being "an obscure presentiment of his own error, an expression, as it were, observable only in rare moments, of heightened, critical awareness which had attained a certain ironic perspective of its own necessary inner nature." Similarly we find, precisely in the greater and more highly developed historians, an awareness, often reduced to a general skepticism, of the great absurdity and superstition in the belief that a nation's education should be as radically historical as ours now is. Whereas the strongest nations, strong in both deeds and works, have lived differently from us, have educated their youth in a different way.

But this absurdity, this superstition, suits us—or so the skeptical objection runs—because we are the latecomers, the last, anemic descendants of strong and happy generations—the very generation predicted by Hesiod when he said that someday men would suddenly be born with gray hair, and that Zeus, as soon as he saw this visible sign, would destroy them. Historical culture is in fact a kind of congenital grayness, and those who bear the mark of it from childhood are destined to achieve an instinctive belief in the *old age of mankind.* But old age is quite properly devoted to the activities of old men, that is, to looking backwards, making its reckonings, concluding accounts, seeking comfort in the past by means of memory—in short, historical culture. But the human species is tough and tenacious, and it dislikes being observed in its steps—forwards and backwards—after several thousands of years, or hardly even after hundreds of millennia; that is, mankind as a whole does *not want* to be observed from the perspective of that infinitesimally small atomic mite, the individual man. For what do a few millennia (or, alternatively, the span of thirty-four consecutive human lives of sixty years) matter, if at the beginning we can speak of the "youth" of the species, and of its "old age" at the end?

Isn't there rather a tincture in this paralyzing belief that mankind is already decaying, a misunderstanding bequeathed us by the Middle Ages, of the Christian theological concept of the imminent end of the world, of the dread expectation of the Last Judgment? Could it be that this concept has disguised itself as an increased need for historical judgment, as though our age, the last possible, age, were authorized to pronounce, on the whole human past, the Last Judgment—a judgment which Christianity expected not from man, but from the "Son of Man"? In the past, this memento mori,[34] addressed to the species as well as the individual, was a terribly

34. "Remember you are mortal."

painful goad, the summit, as it were, of knowledge and conscience in the Middle Ages. But the reply of the modern age—*memento vivere*[35]—sounds, to speak frankly, quite timid; it lacks resonance; there is a hint of insincerity. For mankind is still fixed on the old memento mori, as its universal historical need makes clear. Knowledge, despite very energetic beating of its wings, is still earthbound and cannot fly; a deep sense of hopelessness persists, and it has taken on that historical coloring which now casts a depressing gloom over all higher education and culture. A religion which regards the last hours of a human life as the most important, which predicts the end of all earthly existence and condemns the living to live in the fifth act of a tragedy, certainly will arouse the profoundest and noblest resources; but it is hostile to all new cultivation, all daring experiment, free desiring. It is opposed to every flight into the unknown, since it feels neither love nor hope for such a flight. Against its wishes, it lets events take their own course in order to choose the right moment for repudiating them, or for sacrificing them as corruptors of life, as a lie about the value of existence. What the Florentines did when, under the influence of Savonarola's call to repentance, they organized those notorious bonfires of paintings, manuscripts, mirrors, and masks, is precisely what Christianity would like to do to every culture that incites men to further striving and adopts *memento vivere* as its motto. And when it proves impossible to do this directly without subterfuge, which is to say, by violence, it achieves its purpose just as effectively by allying itself with historical culture, usually without being detected. And then, speaking in the name of this culture, it shrugs off all new movements, enveloping them in the feeling that they are too late, the work of epigones—in short, that they are congenitally gray. The bitter and profoundly depressing reflection that no event has any value, that the world is ripe for judgment, is dissipated into the skeptical conviction that it is good at least to know everything that has happened because it is too late to do something better. In this way the historical sense makes its servants passive and retrospective; and it is almost solely in a moment of forgetfulness, when the historical sense is absent, that the man who is ill of historical fever is able to act. But no sooner is the action done, then he dissects it, and, by analyzing it thoroughly, prevents it from continuing to have an effect, finally stripping it bare and reducing it to "history." In this sense we are still living in the Middle Ages, and history is still for us a camouflaged theology, just as the reverence with which the layman regards the learned is a reverence passed on from the clergy. What people once gave to the Church, they now give, less generously, to education. But the fact that they give anything at all derives from the Church, not from the modern spirit, which, despite its other good traits, is notoriously stingy and, in the aristocratic virtue of generosity, a bungler.

35. "Remember you are alive."

This observation is perhaps distasteful, as distasteful perhaps as my derivation of the excess of history from the medieval memento mori and Christianity's profound hopelessness in regard to the whole future of our earthly existence. But the reader will provide better explanations than those which I have somewhat hesitantly advanced; for the origin of historical culture—as well as its intrinsic and absolutely radical inconsistency with the spirit of a "new age," a modern consciousness—*must* itself in turn be historically understood. And the problem of history *must* also be solved by history itself; knowledge *must* apply the goad to knowledge. This triple *must* is the spiritual imperative of the "new age," provided that this age genuinely contains something new, powerful, original, something that promises life. Or, leaving aside the Latin notions, is it true that we Germans must always remain mere "descendants" in all the higher areas of culture simply because this is all we are *capable* of being? In a statement worth pondering, Wilhelm Wackernagel[36] once asserted: "We Germans are a nation of descendants; in all our higher knowledge, even in our beliefs, we are mere descendants of the ancient world. Even those who are bitterly opposed to that role, never cease breathing in, with the spirit of Christianity, the immortal spirit of ancient classical culture; and even if they succeeded in separating these two elements from the atmosphere in which they live and breathe, little would be left to sustain us in our spiritual lives." But even if we gladly accepted this fate of being the descendants of antiquity, even if we resolved to accept it energetically, seriously, and with greatness, and to acknowledge this very energy as our unique distinction and privilege, we would still have to ask whether we were forever doomed to be the *disciples of an ancient world in decline.* Someday in the future we might be permitted to set our sights progressively higher and farther; someday we should perhaps be able to praise ourselves for the splendid and creative renewal in ourselves—even by means of our universal history—of the spirit of Hellenistic and Roman civilization—a renewal so splendid that we may, as our supreme reward, set ourselves the still greater task of going back in time far beyond this Alexandrian culture, and with bold gaze seeking our models in that primitive and archaic Greek world of the great, the natural, and the human. *But there we also find the reality of a basically unhistorical culture, a culture which, despite its lack of history or rather precisely because of it, is unbelievably rich and vital.* Even if we Germans were nothing but descendants, we could, by viewing this culture as our inheritance, ours for the taking, find no greater or higher destiny than being "descendants."

I mean to say this and only this: that even the thought, so often painful, that we are epigones can, greatly imagined, guarantee to both the individual

36. Wilhelm Wackernagel (1808–69), distinguished Germanist, editor of Hartmann and Walther von der Vogelweide.

and the nation generous results and a hopeful hunger for the future. It can do so insofar as we regard ourselves as the heirs and descendants of remarkable and classical powers and see in this our honor, our incentive. Then we will not be the pale, emaciated, last descendants of vigorous generations, eking out chilly lives as the antiquaries and gravediggers of those generations. Clearly, such late-born offspring live an ironical existence; annihilation follows their steps as they hobble through life. They shudder when they enjoy the past since they are living memories; but without heirs their memory is meaningless. So they are overwhelmed by the gloomy suspicion that their life is a wrong since no future life can justify it.

But let us imagine that these late offspring, turned antiquarians, suddenly exchanged their sad, ironic resignation for outright impudence. Imagine them loudly, shrilly, proclaiming that the race has reached its peak since it now finally possesses self-knowledge and has become open and honest with itself. The result would be a spectacle that would, as in a simile, explain the puzzling significance for German culture of a certain famous philosophy. I believe that there has not been a dangerous turn or crisis in German culture in this century which has not become more dangerous because of the enormous and still spreading influence of this Hegelian philosophy. Clearly the belief that we are the late offspring of the ages is enervating and depressing; but then brazenly one fine day to turn this belief upside down in order to deify ourselves as the true meaning and purpose of all previous history, defining our own conscious misery as the consummation of world history—this would be monstrous and destructive. Such a way of thinking has accustomed Germans to talking about the "world-process" and justifying their own age as the inevitable result of this world-process; this way of thinking has established history in the place of the other spiritual powers, art and religion, as sole sovereign, insofar as it is the "self-realizing concept," the "dialectic of the spirit of nations," and the "universal judgment."

This Hegelian notion of history has been scornfully dubbed God's sojourn on earth (though this God himself was first created by means of history). But in Hegelian heads this God has become visible and intelligible to himself and has already ascended all the dialectically possible stages of his Becoming up toward this self-revelation. Thus, for Hegel the climax and terminal point of world-process coincide with his own Berlin existence. Indeed, he might have claimed that everything after Hegel should be regarded as a mere musical coda of the world-historical rondo, or, more precisely, as superfluous. He did not claim this; instead he has instilled in the generations nurtured in his philosophy that admiration for the "power of history" which in point of fact is constantly transformed into naked admiration of success and leads to idolatry of the fact—a form of behavior which we now, in a very mythical and also truly German way, tend to call "taking account of the facts." But once a man has learned to bow and scrape

before the "power of history," sooner of later, like a Chinese puppet, he nods approval to every power, whether that of government, public opinion, or numerical majority, dancing in perfect time to the tune of any "power" that pulls his strings. If every success contains its own rational necessity; if every event is a victory of the logical or the "Idea," then fall to your knees this minute and kowtow to the whole scale of "successes"! What, are we no longer ruled by mythologies? What, are religions dying out? But look at the religion of historical power! Observe the priests of the mythology of ideas, note their bruised knees! Aren't all the virtues adherents of this new belief? Or isn't it self-denial when the historical man allows himself to be flattened into an objective crystal mirror? Isn't it magnanimous to reject all force in heaven and on earth by adoring in every force only force itself? Isn't it justice always to hold the scales of power in your hand and carefully observe which pan sinks, which is the stronger and heavier power? And what an education in "propriety" is this view of history! To accept everything objectively, never to be angered by anything, to love nothing and understand everything—how soft and submissive this makes a man! And even if someone reared in this school is publicly irritated and exasperated, we find it pleasant because we know very well that everything is being done for artistic effect, that it is *ira* and *studium,* but utterly *sine ira et studio.*[37]

My thoughts about this pastiche of mythology and virtue are very old-fashioned. But, however ludicrous, they must be expressed. So I would say that history always teaches "Once upon a time . . ." and morality always says "Thou shalt not" or "Thou shouldst not have. . . ." Therefore, history is a compendium of effective immorality. How grave an error it would be to view history at the same time as the judge of this effective immorality! It is, for example, a moral outrage that Raphael should die at thirty-six; a man like Raphael should never die. If, as apologists of the actual, you wish to come to the aid of history, you will say that Raphael expressed everything that was in him; longer life would only have enabled him to repeat himself, not to create new beauty, etc., etc. You would thereby become the devil's advocate, precisely because you idolize the event, the fact; but the fact itself is always stupid and has always resembled a calf more than a god. Besides, as apologists of history, your prompter is ignorance, since it is only your ignorance of a *natura naturans*[38] like Raphael that hinders you from being

37. The Roman historian Tacitus avowed (*Annals* 1.1) that he would write "sine ira et studio" (without indignation and partisan involvement). But Nietzsche is here playing upon the German word *Studium,* a formal course of studies grounded in scholarly detachment and "objectivity."

38. Scholastic term meaning "nourishing" or "creative nature," usually opposed to *natura naturata,* i.e., "created" or even "man-made" nature. Compare, for instance, the dialogue

outraged that he lived and will never live again. Somebody recently tried to tell the world that Goethe at eighty-two had exhausted himself. Yet I would happily exchange whole cartloads of fresh, ultramodern lives for a few years of the exhausted Goethe, simply to take part in conversations like those with Eckermann, and, by so doing, spare myself all the modish teachings of the legionnaires of the present moment. How few men there are, in comparison with the great dead, who really deserve to live! That the many live and these few no longer do, is nothing but a brutal truth, an irremediable stupidity, a crude "That's the way things are" as opposed to the moral response, "Things shouldn't be that way." Yes, as opposed to morality! Mention what virtue you will; speak of justice, generosity, bravery; talk of wisdom and human compassion—in every case the man of virtue rebels against the blind power of facts, against the tyranny of the actual, subjecting himself to laws which are not the laws of historical flux. He always swims against the tide of history, whether he is struggling against his passions as the most immediate, stupid "given" fact of his existence, or devoting himself to honesty, while the lie everywhere around him weaves its glistening nets.

If history were nothing more than "the universal system of passion and error," mankind would have to read it in the same way Goethe advises it to read *The Sorrows of Young Werther*: as though it shouted, "Be a man and do not follow me!" But, fortunately, history also preserves for us the memories of the great fighters *against history,* that is, against the blind power of actuality, and indicts itself by exalting as truly historical men precisely those who disregard "the way things are" in their serenely proud quest of "the way things ought to be." What drives them indefatigably lies not in carrying their generation to the grave, but in creating a new generation. And if they themselves were born latecomers—there is a way of living which annuls the memory of that fact—future generations will know them only as the forerunners.

9 Is our age perhaps such a forerunner? In point of fact, our historical sense is so vehement, expressing itself in such sweep-

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between Perdita and Polixenes in Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale,* iv, 4, 86ff.:

Perdita: For I have heard it said
There is an art which in their [gillyvors] piedness shares
With great creating nature.

Polixenes: Say there be;
Yet nature is made better by no mean
But nature makes that mean: so, over that art,
Which you say adds to nature, is an art
That nature makes. . . .
This is an art
Which does mend nature—change it rather—but
The art itself is nature.

ing and absolute language, that in this respect at least our age will be honored as a forerunner by future ages—assuming, of course, that there will actually be *future ages,* that is, cultured ages. But this very assumption remains gravely doubtful. Directly related to modern man's pride are his *irony* about himself, his awareness that he must live in a historicizing and twilight atmosphere, as it were, his fear that in the future he will be quite unable to preserve his youthful hopes and vigor. Here and there some go further, they become *cynical,* quite literally justifying the course of history, indeed the evolution of the world, for modern man's convenience according to the cynical axiom that everything was destined to be precisely what it now is. Men had to become what they now are and not something else, and against this "necessity" there can be no rebellion. The comfort afforded by this kind of cynicism is a refuge for those who cannot bear to live ironical lives. Besides, the last decade has provided them with one of its finest inventions, a rich and sonorous rhetoric for their cynicism; their opportunistic and mindless mode of living is now dubbed "the total surrender of personality to the world-process."

Personality and the world-process! World-process and the personality of the flea! If only we were not endlessly forced to listen to this most hyperbolic of hyperboles—the word *world, world, world,* inasmuch as it is only about *man, man, man* that we can, with honesty, speak. Heirs of the Greeks and Romans? Of Christianity? All this seems insignificant to these cynics. But heirs of the world-process! Apex and goal of the world-process! Ripest fruit on the tree of knowledge, meaning and solution of the whole riddle of Becoming—this is what I call inflated grandeur—the sign by which the first forerunners of all epochs can be recognized, even if they are the latest of latecomers. Never, even in dreams, has the conception of history soared so high. For human history has now become merely the continuation of the development of plants and animals; indeed, in the lowest depths of the ocean, in the living slime, the historical universalist still finds traces of himself. Gazing in amazement at the immense distance already traversed by mankind, he reels before the sight of an even more incredible miracle—modern man himself, whose vision can survey this long ascent to himself. He stands tall and proud atop the pyramid of world-process; at the apex he sets the capstone of his knowledge, and he seems to shout aloud to nature listening all around him, "We have reached the peak; we are at the goal; we *are* the goal; we are the fulfillment of nature!" Overproud European of the nineteenth century, you are raving mad! Your knowledge does not fulfill nature; it merely kills your own nature. Assess your height as a man of knowledge by your depth as a man of action. True, you climb toward heaven on the sunlight of knowledge, but you also sink downwards toward chaos. Your mode of moving, the fact that you climb by what you know, is what dooms you. Earth and soil crumble uncertainly beneath you; your life has

nothing to support it, nothing now but spiderwebs, torn by every fresh lunge of your knowledge. —But enough of these grim forebodings, since we can speak of more cheerful matters.

The fact that all foundations are being torn apart and destroyed with mindless rage, their dissolution into a ruinous flux of Becoming, the tireless unraveling and historicizing of everything that *has* become by modern man, the great spider tangled in the universal web—all this may interest and worry the moralist, artist, and religious man, perhaps even the statesman. But we, for our part, should for the moment be delighted to see this spectacle in the shimmering magic mirror of a *philosophical parodist*, a parodist in whose mind our age has achieved an ironical self-consciousness, and has done so with a clarity which, to use Goethe's expression, "approaches villainy." Hegel once taught us that "when the Spirit makes a sudden leap, we philosophers are there too." Our age made a leap toward self-irony, and lo, there was Eduard von Hartmann[39] too, author of the famous philosophy of the Unconscious—or more precisely, the philosophy of the ironic unconscious. Rarely have we read a more humorous fiction or a more philosophical fraud than Hartmann's work. Anyone whom he fails to enlighten, indeed, utterly re-educate, on the subject of *becoming* clearly deserves to be called a "has-been." The beginning and the end of the world-process, from the first startling shock of consciousness to the final plunge back into nothingness, including the exact description of our generation's role in this world-process—all this he derives from the unconscious, the inspirational source which Hartmann so ingeniously invents, and bathes in such apocalyptic light; all this he counterfeits so cunningly, with such candor and sincerity, that it seems like serious, not merely burlesque, philosophy. —An achievement of such magnitude establishes Hartmann as one of the leading philosophical parodists of all times; so let us make sacrifice upon his altar, let us sacrifice a lock of hair to Hartmann, the inventor of a genuine panacea—to borrow Schleiermacher's[40] formula of admiration. For what better cure for the excessively historical bent of our culture could there be than Hartmann's parody of all world history?

39. Eduard von Hartmann (1842–1906), metaphysician and author of *Die Philosophie des Unbewussten* (1869), whose liberal and optimistic spirit captured a wide and admiring readership in Nietzsche's Germany. Essentially late romantic in its outlook, it stressed both traditional teleology and irrationalism, based upon a perversion of Schopenhauer—whence, in part, Nietzsche's persistent contempt for Hartmann—fashionably adulterated with doctrines drawn from Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. In the main, however, Hartmann's philosophy is an effort to combine Schopenhauer's notion of the Will with Hegel's ideas of the unconscious self-realization and revelation of the Idea or Reason in human history.

40. Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768–1834), the most eminent German Protestant theologian of the romantic period.

If we were to state succinctly the oracle pronounced by Hartmann from his smoky tripod of unconscious irony, we would say: he proclaims that our age must only remain precisely what it is, if humanity is someday to become truly glutted with existence—a belief with which I heartily concur. That alarming ossification of our age, that restless rattling of bones—which David Strauss has naively described as the most splendid concrete reality—is justified by Hartmann not only from the standpoint of the past, *ex causis efficientibus,*[41] but even on the basis of the future, *ex causa finali.*[42] From the Day of Judgment back to the present, this scoundrel floods his light on our age, and he finds it very good; that is, for those who want to suffer as much as possible from the indigestibility of life, for whom Judgment Day cannot arrive too soon. True, Hartmann refers to the age which humanity is now approaching as its "manhood,"[43] but, according to his description, this manhood will be a blissful state in which there is nothing but "solid mediocrity,"[44] and art will be the equivalent of "a late evening's farce for, say, a Berlin stockbroker";[45] a period in which "we no longer need genius, since that would be throwing pearls before swine, or even because the age has progressed beyond the stage at which genius is relevant, to a more important stage"[46]—that is, to the period of social development in which every worker "has working hours allowing him sufficient leisure for his intellectual improvement, and leads a comfortable life." Scoundrel of scoundrels, you express modern man's yearning; but you also know what sort of specter will appear at the end of this manhood of mankind as a result of that intellectual education toward solid mediocrity. I mean *nausea.* Obviously things are wretchedly bad, but our wretchedness will become much worse—clearly "the Antichrist will gain more and more ground."[47] But we are wretched of *necessity,* and it must *necessarily* happen, for only in this way can we enter on the good road—to the feeling of disgust for every living thing. "So, as laborers in the vineyard of the Lord, let us strive vigorously to advance the world-process, since only process can bring us to our redemption!"[48]

The vineyard of the Lord! The process! The road to redemption! Is there anyone who cannot see that here historical culture, which knows only the word *becoming,* deliberately disguises itself behind this caricature, saying the most petulant things about itself behind its grotesque mask? For what does

41. "through efficient causes"
42. "through a final cause"
43. *Philosophie,* 619ff.
44. Ibid., 618.
45. Ibid., 619.
46. Ibid., 619.
47. Ibid., 610.
48. Ibid., 637–38.

this final fraudulent appeal to the laborers in the vineyard really ask of them? What task should they vigorously strive to advance? Or, to put it another way, what tasks remain to be performed by the man of historical culture, the modern fanatic of process, swimming and drowning in the river of becoming, in order someday to harvest this vineyard's most delectable grape—nausea? —All he can do is to go on living as he has lived, loving what he has always loved, hating what he has always hated, and reading the newspapers he has always read. For him there is only one sin—living in a different way. But his way of life is described to us with extraordinary, lapidary clarity on that celebrated page, its propositions printed in bold capitals, that page over which all the cultural scum of the present are so blindly rapturous and ecstatic, believing it to be the vindication of their own lives, one which they read in an apocalyptic light. For every individual the unconscious parodist required "the full surrender of his personality to the world-process, for the sake of its goal, the redemption of the world."[49] Or even more clearly and distinctly: "The affirmation of the will to live is now the only thing whose rightness can be asserted; for only in the full surrender to life and its sorrows, not in cowardly personal resignation and withdrawal, can anything be done for the world-process";[50] and: "The striving toward individual negation of the will is as foolish and useless, indeed even more foolish, than suicide";[51] and: "The thoughtful reader will understand without further explanations what form a practical philosophy based on these principles would take, and will realize that such a philosophy must necessarily embrace a full reconciliation with life, not an estrangement from it."[52]

The thoughtful reader will understand. As though Hartmann could be *mis*understood! And how incredibly funny is the fact that he was misunderstood! Are modern Germans very subtle? An observant Englishman feels that they lack "delicacy of perception"; indeed, he boldly says that "in the German mind there does seem to be something splay, something blunt-edged, unhandy, and infelicitous."[53] Perhaps our great German parodist would care to object? True, according to his explanation, we are approaching "that ideal state in which the human race makes its own history in full consciousness of what it does," but we are clearly rather far from that presumably even more ideal state in which humanity will read Hartmann's book in full consciousness. If we ever reach that state, it will be impossible for anyone to speak of "world-process" without smiling, for the phrase will

49. Ibid., 638.
50. Ibid., 638.
51. Ibid., 635–36.
52. Ibid., 638.
53. A quotation, I believe, from Walter Bagehot, whose *Physics and Politics* (1869) enjoyed very wide and enthusiastic circulation throughout Europe. See *SE*, 3 and n. 12.

recall an age when Hartmann's evangelistic parody was actually heeded, studied, debated, admired, elaborated, and canonized with all the sincerity of the "German mind" our Englishman has described, or rather, in Goethe's phrase, with "the grotesque seriousness of the owl." But the world must progress; we cannot achieve this ideal state of consciousness merely by dreaming on it; we must fight it and conquer it, and only through serenity lies the road to redemption—redemption, that is, from this owlish seriousness. The time will come when we will wisely avoid all interpretations of the world-process, or even human history; when historians generally will no longer consider the masses, but rather those individuals who form a kind of bridge over the wild torrent of Becoming. These individuals by no means continue a process, but, thanks to history which makes concerted effort possible, they live as timeless contemporaries in that republic of genius described by Schopenhauer.[54] Across the desolate gulfs of time, giant calls to giant and, undisturbed by the noisy, clamoring dwarfs creeping around below them, the high discourse of spirits proceeds. It is the task of history to mediate between them and, by so doing, to provide fresh opportunities and to concert our forces in the creation of greatness. No, the *goal of humanity* cannot lie at the end of history, but only in the *highest human exemplars.*

Our droll authority, of course, with that admirable dialectic of his, no less genuine than his admirers are admirable, asserts precisely the opposite:

> It would be quite as incompatible with the concept of evolution to ascribe infinite duration to the world-process in the past—since in that case every conceivable development would already have taken place, which is clearly not the case (O villain!)—as to impute to it an endless duration in the future. For both assumptions would nullify the idea of evolution towards a goal (O damnable villain!) and reduce the world-process to the vain labor of the Danaids. The completed triumph of the logical over the illogical (O damnably villainous villain!) must coincide, however, with the temporal end of the world-process, with the Last Judgment.[55]

No, you transparent mocker, so long as the illogical still prevails as it does at present; so long, for instance, as you can still elicit general approval for your doctrine of the "world-process," Judgment Day is still a long way off. It is still too pleasant here on earth, and many illusions still flourish (like your contemporaries' illusion about you), and we are not yet ready to plunge back into your nothingness. We believe that life here on earth will become even more pleasant when people at last begin to understand you (O mis-

54. *Parerga and Paralipomena,* §256.
55. Hartmann, *Philosophie,* 637.

understood, unconscious scoundrel!). But if you should, nevertheless, be overcome with nausea as you prophesied to your readers; if your description of your present and future proves to be right—and nobody has ever felt more loathing for the present and the future than you—then I am quite ready to cast my vote with the majority in the way you proposed, to end your world next Saturday evening on the stroke of midnight. And our decree will conclude: "As of tomorrow there will be no more time, and no more newspapers will appear." But if our decree has no effect and we fail to bring about the desired results, well, in any case we will still have time to perform a splendid experiment. Let us take a pair of scales; set Hartmann's unconscious in one pan and his world-process in the other. There are some men who believe that both would weigh the same since both pans hold equally bad words and equally good jokes. —When Hartmann's joke is at last understood, people will only use his phrase *world-process* in jest. But in point of fact it is high time to train every engine of satirical destruction against the excesses of the historical sense; against the immoderate delight in process at the expense of life and being; against the mindless dislocation of all perspectives. And we should always praise the author of *The Philosophy of the Unconscious* for his success in first clearly recognizing the ridiculous element in the idea of "world-process" and, thanks to the extraordinary seriousness of his argument, in making us realize the absurdity of it with even greater clarity. Why the world exists, why mankind exists, should now not trouble us in the least unless we want to joke about it; in fact, the pretension of the tiny human worm is surely the most comical, the funniest scene on the face of the earth. But why do you as an individual exist? Ask yourself this question, and if no one can tell you, then try to justify the meaning of your existence a posteriori, as it were, by determining your own purpose, a goal, a "reason why," a high and noble "reason why." Then go perish in the attempt—I can conceive of no greater aim in life than to die while attempting a great and impossible task, *animae magnae prodigus*.[56]

If, however, the doctrines of sovereign Becoming, the fluidity of all concepts, types, and species, the lack of all cardinal distinctions between man and beast—doctrines which I consider true but deadly—are inflicted on the public for another generation in the modern craze for education, then no one should be surprised if the nation perishes of egoistical triviality and misery, of ossification and selfishness, that is, if it begins to fall apart and ceases to be a nation. Then perhaps in its place organized groups of individual egoisms, brotherhoods whose purpose is the greedy exploitation of nonbrothers, and similar creations of utilitarian vulgarity, will appear. —To make ready for such groups, we have only to go on writing history from the

56. Literally, "prodigal of a great soul," i.e., "careless of a great life." The phrase comes from Horace *Odes* 1.12.38.

standpoint of the *masses*, exploring that viewpoint in search of those laws that can be deduced from the needs of these masses, in other words, the laws that govern the movements of society's lower strata, its loam and clay. Only in three respects does it seem to me that the masses are deserving of notice: first, as faint copies of great men, printed with worn-out plates on cheap paper; second, as resistance to the great; and third, as instruments of the great. For anything else, let the devil and the statistician have them. What, can statistics prove that there are laws in history? Laws? Yes, they prove how vulgar and disgustingly uniform the masses are. Are we to apply the term *laws* to the effects of gravity, stupidity, mimicry, love, and hunger? Well, suppose we grant it; but if so, the corollary is also true: insofar as there are laws in history, the laws are worthless and history is worthless. But at present the style of history most admired is precisely that which views the great instincts of the masses as crucial and paramount, and all great men as merely the clearest expression of these drives, quite as though great men were simply bubbles floating on that great mass-tide. Thus, the masses presumably generate greatness, in the same way that chaos of itself gives birth to order; and, in conclusion, of course, these historians chant their hymn to the great life-giving masses. Then the word *great* is applied to everything which for a considerable time has moved the masses, which has been, as they say, "a historical power." But isn't this deliberately confusing quantity and quality? If the clumsy masses have found some idea—a religious idea, for instance—satisfactory, if they have tenaciously defended this idea and clung to it for centuries, then and only then is the originator and founder of the idea said to be great. But why? The highest and noblest ideas have no effect on the masses. The historical success of Christianity, its historical power, tenacity, and endurance, fortunately prove nothing about the greatness of its founder, and indeed would even be evidence against it. But between him and that historical success lies a very worldly layer, dark with passion, error, hunger for power and honors, the still-active forces of the *imperium Romanum*, from which Christianity inherited that earthy taste and earthy residue which made possible its persistence in this world, and its staying power. Greatness cannot depend upon success, and Demosthenes is great, even though he failed to succeed. The purest and most authentic disciples of Christianity have always doubted and obstructed, rather than promoted, its worldly success, its so-called historical power. In early times they habitually took their stand outside the "world" and gave no thought to the "process of the Christian idea." This is why, for the most part, they remain wholly anonymous and unknown to history. In Christian terms, it is the devil who rules this world, who is the lord of success and progress; he is the real power behind all historical powers, and so he will essentially remain—though this may be painful news to an age accustomed to deify

success and historical power. That is, it has acquired the habit of giving new names to things and baptizing even the devil.

This is unmistakably an hour of great peril. Men seem on the verge of discovering that the egoism of individuals, groups, or masses has always been the motivating power of historical movements. But at the same time, they are not in the least alarmed by this discovery: egoism will be our god. Armed with this new faith, they set out, transparently determined to make egoism the foundation of future history, on condition that this egoism should prudently impose a few limits on itself in order to strengthen itself and endure; an egoism, in short, which studies history precisely in order to acquaint itself with imprudent egoism. From this study they have learned that, in the universal system of egoism they want to establish, the state has a very special role; it must act as patron of all prudent egoisms and protect them by its military and political power against the terrible explosions of imprudent egoism. To the same end they have taken pains to indoctrinate the working classes and the dangerous (because imprudent) masses with history, both natural and human, knowing that a light rinse of historical culture will subdue desire and the cruder, dark instincts, or lead them on the road to refined egoism. In sum, modern man, in the words of Hartmann, is concerned with "a practical, comfortable accommodation of his earthly home, an accommodation which prudently has its eye on the future."[57] The same writer calls such an age the "manhood of humanity," thereby making a mockery of what is now called "man," as though it referred only to the disenchanted egoist. In the same way he prophesies an old age corresponding to such a manhood, but obviously only venting his sarcasm on his older contemporaries. For he speaks of the ripe contemplation with which they survey "all the stormy, dissolute sufferings of their former lives, and realize the vanity of what they had once supposed to be the goals of their striving." No, the old age that corresponds to the manhood of this cunning and historically educated egoism is one devoid of dignity, which clings to life with disgusting greediness, and then a final act—

> That ends this strange eventful history,
> Is second childishness and mere oblivion
> Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.[58]

Whether the dangers threatening our life and culture come from these dissolute, toothless, and tasteless old men or from Hartmann's so-called men, we will sink our teeth into the rights of the young in defiance of both, and in our youth tirelessly defend the future against those vandals who

57. Hartmann, *Philosophie,* 625.
58. Shakespeare, *As You Like It,* ii, 7, 164–66.

assault the images of the future. But in this struggle we must also make an acutely painful observation: *The excesses of the historical sense, from which the present suffers, are deliberately promoted, encouraged, and—utilized.*

But these excesses are utilized against youth in order to train them to that mature egoism to which the whole world aspires. They are used to overcome youth's natural aversion to egoism by showing the young, by means of scholarship's magic lantern, an enlarged image of this manly yet unmanly egoism. We know, of course, what the study of history is capable of when it holds sway; we know only too well. It is capable of eradicating youth's strongest instincts—ardor, obstinacy, unselfishness, love—and of casting a cold spell on youth's passion for justice; of suppressing or repressing youth's desire to ripen slowly, encouraging instead youth's opposite desire to be immediately ready, immediately useful, immediately productive; of infecting youth's honesty and passion of feeling with doubt. Yes, history is even capable of defrauding youth of its loveliest privilege, its strength for planting inwardly, with invincible confidence, a great idea, and letting an even greater thought grow from this. We have seen that a certain excess of history is capable of all this, precisely because, by continually shifting perspectives and horizons, by eliminating the surrounding atmosphere, it prevents man from feeling and acting *unhistorically.* From the infinity of this horizon, he then retreats into himself, into the smallest parish of his egoism, and is there doomed to arid sterility. He will probably attain cleverness, but never wisdom. He compromises, calculates, and adjusts himself to the facts; he shuns outbursts of anger, he winks, he knows how to pursue his own opportunity or his party's to advantage or disadvantage; he liberates himself from unnecessary modesty and becomes by degrees an "old man," a "Hartmann-man." But this is what he is *fated* to become; this is precisely what is meant by the cynical demand that he should "completely surrender his personality to the world-process"—in order to achieve his goal, which, as the scoundrel Hartmann assures us, is the redemption of the world. Now the goal and purpose of these "men" and Hartmann's "old men" can hardly be the "deliverance of the world." But surely the world's deliverance would be brought much nearer, if only it could be delivered of these "men" and dotards. And the kingdom of youth would be at hand.—

10 Remembering *youth* at this point, I cry out, "Land ho!" Enough and more than enough of this passionate, wandering journey on dark and alien seas! Landfall at last! No matter where it is, we must disembark; even the poorest haven is better than being swept back into the infinity of hopeless skepticism. Our first task is to make land. Later we will find good harbors and help others who come after us to put in to shore.

Our journey was exciting and dangerous. How far we have come from

that calm contemplation with which we first saw our ship launched! We went in quest of the dangers of history, and yet it was we ourselves who were especially exposed to these very dangers; we ourselves bear the mark of the sufferings with which an excess of history has afflicted modern man. And I would not deny that this essay itself, in its excessively critical spirit, in its immature humanity, in its veering between irony and cynicism, from pride to skepticism—evinces its modern character, its characteristic weakness of personality. Nonetheless, I have confidence in the inspiring power which, in the absence of a tutelary genius, guides my course, confident that *youth* has guided me well if it now compels me to *protest against the historical education imposed on the young by modern man,* and if in my protest I demand that man must above all learn to live, and use history only in *service of the life he has learned to live.* One must be young to understand this protest, and, given the precocious senility of modern youth, it is almost impossible to be sufficiently young to grasp precisely what I am here protesting.

An example will suffice. In Germany, not much more than a century ago, a few young men were stirred by a natural instinct for what is known as poetry. Are we to suppose that earlier generations or their own contemporaries were wholly silent about the art of poetry, which was intrinsically strange and unnatural? On the contrary, we know that these generations, with all the strength at their command, thought, wrote, and debated about poetry with words about words, words, words. The ensuing rebirth of the word did not also mean the death of these word-smiths; in some sense, they are still alive today. For if, as Gibbon asserts, nothing but time—but a great deal of that—is needed for a world's decline and fall, then nothing but time, but a great deal more time, is required in Germany, the "land of the gradual,"[59] for a false idea to disappear. Nevertheless, there are now perhaps a hundred more men who understand what poetry is then there were a century ago; in another hundred years perhaps there will be a hundred more who have learned what culture is, and that, for all their chatter and preening, Germans still do not possess a culture. In their eyes the prevalent complacency of the Germans about culture will seem as incredible and shallow as the classicism attributed to Gottsched[60] or Ramler's[61] reputation as a German Pindar now seem to us. They will perhaps conclude that this culture of ours is merely some sort of knowledge about culture and, furthermore,

59. Hartmann, *Philosophie,* 638.

60. Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700–66), German literary critic and francophile. His avowed hope was to create a linguistic reform designed to forge a single educated German speech, and at the same time to make French classicism the model of German poetry and drama.

61. Karl Wilhelm Ramler (1728–98), professor of logic at a Berlin military academy, but also an aspiring poet of classicizing bent.

that the knowledge is quite false and superficial. False and superficial, that is, because we tolerate the gulf between life and knowledge; because we never exhibit the characteristics of a culture—a culture which can only grow and flourish from life, whereas, among the Germans, it is like a paper flower, pinned to us, or spread on like icing, and therefore doomed to perpetual falsehood and sterility.

But the education of German youth derives precisely from this false and sterile concept of culture. At its purest and loftiest, its object is certainly not to produce the liberally educated man, but rather the learned man, the scholar, and above all the scholar who can be put to use at the earliest possible age, who removes himself from life in order to observe it as objectively as possible. The result, apparent from the most ordinary empirical observation, is the cultural philistine, stuffed with history and aesthetics, always ready to chat with an air of precocious wisdom about religion, politics, and art—a *sensorium* for thousands of borrowed sentiments; an insatiable stomach, as it were, utterly ignorant of real hunger and real thirst. The fact that such an education, with this purpose and these results, is unnatural is recognized only by those who have not yet been fully formed by it. It is instinctively recognized only by the young, because they still possess natural instincts which have not yet been accurately and violently destroyed by this education. But those who in turn would like to destroy this education must help the young to express themselves, must use the clarity of their ideas to illuminate the unconscious resistance of youth and convert this into outspoken consciousness. But how can such a breathtaking purpose be achieved?

Above all, by destroying a superstition, the conviction that this educational operation is *necessary.* It is still believed that there could be no possible alternative to this terribly painful modern reality of ours. With this belief in mind, one need simply examine what has been written in recent decades on secondary and higher education. To his surprise and indignation, he will discover that, despite all the divergence of opinion and violent controversies, there is no significant disagreement about the general aims of education; he will discover how mindlessly the current product, the "educated man" as now defined, is assumed to be the rational and necessary basis of all future education. The doctrine of our educationists is monotonously the same: the young must start with knowledge of culture, not with knowledge of life, even less with life and experience itself. And of course this knowledge is instilled or inculcated in the youth in the form of historical knowledge, which means that his mind is stuffed with an enormous quantity of ideas drawn not from immediate intuition of life, but from an expertly mediated knowledge of past ages and nations. The youth's yearning to experience things for himself, to feel his own experiences growing inside him, in vivid, integrated coherence—this desire is drugged and intoxicated as it were by

the delightful delusion that in a few short years he can assimilate the most sublime and unusual experiences of past ages, above all the greatest ages. It is precisely the same idiotic method that sends our young painters to museums and galleries rather than the workshops of a master, and, above all, the unique workshop of that unique master, Nature. Quite as though, like tourists hurriedly escorted through history, we could pick up the skills and arts of the past! As though life itself were not a craft which had to be thoroughly and constantly mastered, which must be relentlessly practiced, if bunglers and busybodies are not to take over!

Plato thought it necessary for the first generation of his new society (in the ideal state) to be educated by means of a great, *necessary lie.*[62] Children had to learn to believe that for a certain time they had all lived in a dream-state beneath the earth, where they were shaped and formed by the demiurge of Nature. Impossible to rebel against this past! Impossible to oppose the work of the gods! This must be regarded as an inviolable law of nature: those who were born to be philosophers had bodies of gold, guardians only of silver, and laborers of iron and bronze. Just as these metals, Plato explains, cannot be mixed, so the caste system cannot be overthrown or blurred: faith in the *aeterna veritas*[63] of this order is the basis of the new education, and, therefore, of the new state. The modern German now has the same faith in the aeterna veritas of his education, in his brand of culture; yet this faith would founder, just as Plato's Republic would founder, if the necessary lie were ever confronted with a *necessary truth*—namely, that the German does not possess a culture since, given his educational grounding, he cannot have one. He wants the flower without root and stem; so his wanting it is futile. This is the simple truth, unpleasant and crude, but a necessary truth.

But *our first generation* must be reared in this necessary truth; it clearly suffers most severely from it since this truth is the means by which each member of our generation must educate himself, and this means educating himself against himself, in new habits and a new nature, abandoning his old nature and earlier habits. Hence, he could say to himself, in classical Spanish, "Defienda me Dios de my"—God protect me from myself, that is, from the nature I have already acquired. He must savor this truth drop by drop, like a strong and bitter medicine; and every individual of this generation must overcome himself in order to pass judgment on himself—a judgment which he might find more endurable as a general judgment on his whole age, namely:

> We have no culture; even worse, we are spoiled with respect to life, to seeing and hearing clearly and simply, to taking joyfully what lies to

62. See Plato *Republic* 3.414b.
63. "eternal truth"

hand, the near and natural things. To this day we still do not have even the basis for a culture because we ourselves are not convinced that an authentic life is ours. Here I am, disintegrated and fragmented, my whole nature almost mechanically split into interior and exterior, sown with concepts like so many dragon's teeth, breeding conceptual dragons, suffering also from the disease of words and lacking faith in any feeling which has not yet been stamped with words. Being what I am, this lifeless but incredibly busy factory of words and concepts, I may perhaps have the right to say of myself, "Cogito, ergo sum,"[64] but not "*Vivo, ergo cogito.*"[65] Empty "being" is granted to me, not full, fresh life; my most personal awareness merely assures me I am a thinking, not a living, being; that I am not an animal, but at best some sort of *cogital.* "First give me life, and from it I will then create a culture for you!"—that is the cry of every individual of this first generation, and we all recognize each other by virtue of that cry.

But who will grant them this life? Neither god nor man, but only their *youth.* Unshackle youth and by so doing you will have liberated life. For in actuality it was merely hidden away, in prison; it is not yet decaying and dying. Ask yourself!

But it is sick, this unshackled life, and must be healed. It is sick with many ills, not only the memory of its chains, but also—and this is of special concern to us—with the *historical sickness.* Excess of history has exhausted the shaping power of life, it can no longer take potent nourishment from the past. This illness is frightful, and yet, unless youth possessed Nature's clairvoyant gift, nobody would recognize that it is an illness and that we have lost a paradise of health. But with the healing instinct of that same Nature, youth also divines how our lost paradise can be regained; it knows the simples and remedies for our historical sickness, for the excess of history.

What are the names of these remedies? Don't be surprised that the names of these remedies are poisons. The antidotes to history are the *unhistorical and the supra-historical.* With these terms we return to the beginning of our discussion and its serenity of spirit.

By the term *unhistorical* I mean man's skill and power to *forget,* his ability to seclude himself within a limited *horizon.* By *supra-historical* I mean those forces which direct our eyes away from Becoming and toward that which gives existence its eternal and unchanging character, toward art and *religion. Scientific scholarship*—for it is this that would speak of poisons—sees in these forces and powers forces antagonistic to its own since, according to it, only that view of things is true and genuine, that is, scientific, which everywhere

64. Descartes' famous formula: "I think, therefore I am."
65. "I live, therefore I think."

observes the Becoming, the historical element, always ignoring the Being element of the eternal. Just as it is inherently opposed to the eternalizing forces of art and religion, so too it abhors all forgetting and the death of knowledge, as it struggles to annihilate every limitation of the horizon and plunges man into that eternally infinite sea of shimmering waves, in the sea of known Becoming.

If only men could live in that sea! Just as cities collapse when devastated by earthquakes and men nervously and fearfully build their houses on volcanic ground, so life also collapses, becoming discouraged and feeble, when a conceptual upheaval provoked by science deprives man of the basis of all his security and peace, his faith in the enduring and eternal. But should life prevail over knowledge, over science, or should knowledge govern life? Which of these two powers is higher and decisive? Nobody will doubt that life is the higher and dominant power, since if knowledge destroyed life, it would have destroyed itself, too. Since knowledge presupposes life, it has as much interest in preserving life as has every being in prolonging its own existence. For this reason scientific scholarship needs the supervision and surveillance of a higher power. A *hygiene of life* has its own place at the side of science, and one of the principles of this hygiene would be that the unhistorical and the supra-historical are the natural antidotes to the suffocation of life by history, by the historical sickness. It is probable that we, the historically sick, will have to suffer from these antidotes, too. But the fact that we suffer from the antidotes is no argument against the correctness of the chosen therapy.

And here I recognize the mission of this *youth,* this generation of warriors and dragon-killers who presage a more felicitous, more beautiful culture and humanity, without experiencing anything more than an auspicious presentiment of this future happiness and beauty. This youthful generation will suffer from the evil and the remedy at one and the same time; and yet they believe they can boast greater health and vigor, and, in general, a more natural nature than their predecessors, the cultured "men" and "old men" of the present. But their mission is to upset modern concepts of "health" and "culture" and arouse scorn and hatred against these monstrous conceptual hybrids. And the health and vigor of these young people are guaranteed precisely by their inability to use a single concept, a single party slogan, from the stock of words and concepts now current, to designate their own nature. Rather, their conviction comes solely from their faith in a power which is active in them, a power which struggles, discriminates, analyzes, and, in their best moments, in their own increasingly heightened sense of life. It might be objected that this generation lacks culture, but what young man feels this to be a reproach? They might be accused of being rude and intemperate, but they are not yet old and wise enough to know their place. But above all they have no need to feign or defend a ready-made education,

and they enjoy all the privileges and consolations of youth, especially the privilege of bold and courageous honesty and the consolation of an inspiring hope.

I know that in their hearts they understand the abstractions on which these hopes are founded and that through their own experience they will translate them into a doctrine that is personally meaningful. Others in the meantime may see nothing but covered dishes, which might well be empty, until the day when to their astonishment they see with their own eyes that these dishes are full, and that imbedded and compressed in these abstractions are assaults, challenges, vital impulses, and passions that could not long remain concealed. Referring these doubters to time, which reveals everything, I turn in conclusion to that hopeful community and tell its members by means of a parable the course and progress of their cure, their deliverance from the sickness of history, and therefore their own personal story up to the moment when they will once again be well enough to resume the study of history and, under the direction of life, make use of the past in the three historical ways we have described, that is, exemplary, antiquarian, and critical. At that moment they will be less knowledgeable than our contemporary "educated men"; for they will have unlearned much and even lost all desire to give their general attention to what the educated man especially wants to know. The signs by which we will recognize them, from the perspective of our "educated men," are precisely their "lack of culture," their indifference and reserve toward much that is famous, even toward much that is good. But, at the end of their cure, they will once again have become *men* and ceased being human robots. And that is something! There is still hope. Do not, therefore, your hearts rejoice, O ye of good hope?

"But how will we attain our goal?" you will ask. As you begin your hard journey toward your goal, the god of Delphi calls out to you with his famous imperative "Know yourself." It is a hard saying, since the god, in Heraclitus's words, "neither reveals nor conceals, but merely gives a sign."[66] What does his sign mean?

There were centuries in which the Greeks found themselves threatened by a danger similar to that which menaces us, that is, of being submerged by things foreign and past, of perishing by "history." They never lived in proud isolation; on the contrary, their "culture" was for a long time a chaos of foreign ideas and concepts—Semitic, Babylonian, Lydian, and Egyptian; and their religion a genuine conflict among the gods of the whole Orient, just as "German culture" and religion are now an inwardly warring chaos of all foreign countries and all past ages. And yet, thanks to that command of Apollo, Hellenic culture did not become a conglomerate. In accordance with the teaching of Delphi, the Greeks gradually learned to *organize chaos*

66. Kirk and Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 211.

by concentrating on themselves, that is, on their own needs, and letting their apparent needs die out. By so doing, they regained possession of themselves; not long did they remain the glutted heirs and epigones of the entire Orient. After an arduous struggle with themselves, as a result of their practical interpretation of Apollo's command, it was their supreme good fortune to enrich and increase the treasure they had inherited, and to become the forerunners and exemplars of all civilized peoples who succeeded them.

This parable applies to every one of us. Each of us must organize his own inward chaos by concentrating on his own true needs. At some point his sincerity, native strength, and honesty of character must rebel against constant imitation—against imitated speech, imitated learning, imitated behavior. It is then that he begins to grasp the fact that culture can still be something very different from adornment of life—that is, nothing but a sham and a disguise, since all ornaments conceal the thing they adorn. In this way the Greek concept of culture—in contrast to the Roman—will be revealed to him, the concept of culture as a new and improved physis, unified, without the gulf between interior and exterior, without dissimulation and convention; of culture as a harmony of life, thought, appearance, and will. In this way, from his own experience, he will learn that it was by the superior strength of their *moral* character that the Greeks were victorious over all other cultures and that every increase in truthfulness is a necessary step on the way to *true* culture, even though this truthfulness may sometimes do grievous harm to the "concept of culture" in vogue at the time, and even though it may hasten the collapse of an entire decorative culture.